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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the lives of Hispanic women living in Des Moines and includes their views of problems and opportunities involved in living in that city. Interviews were conducted with 24 Latino women over the age of 17 who had been in the area for over 2 years. Findings indicate that learning to speak English was the single most important tool a Latina needed to survive in the United States. Latino youth, particularly Latinas, needed support and assistance in assimilation into the Des Moines community. Residents of Des Moines did not see the potential and talents of Latina women living in the community, did not recognize the vast diversity among the Latinas living in the area, and assumed Latinos all had the same interests and desires. Generally speaking, Des Moines residents expected immigrants to immediately assimilate into the United States, speak the language, obey the laws, and act like Des Moines residents. Recommendations for policymakers include making opportunities for Latinas to learn English more readily available; providing more cultural diversity training with respect to indigenous Latinas who have immigrated to the United States; and creating an information center to help immigrants learn what is expected of individuals living in Des Moines and how to adapt. (Contains 70 references.) (TD)

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ED 459 017

LATINA VOICES OF DES MOINES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the School of Education
Drake University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by P. Dawn Taylor
May 2001

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LATINA VOICES OF DES MOINES

An abstract of a Dissertation by
P. Dawn Taylor
May 2001
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The purpose: The purpose of this study was to provide Latinas in Des Moines an opportunity to describe their lives to others: their families, Latinas who followed in their footsteps, and those in the Des Moines community concerned with fairness and opportunity for all.

The problem: The study described the lives of Hispanic women living in Des Moines, Iowa and included the Latina's views of problems and opportunities living in that city.

Procedures: Twenty-four Latino women who were over the age of 17 and who had been in the area for over two years were interviewed with a fixed set of five questions. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and findings developed.

Findings: Decisions to immigrate were often tortuous, but even more of a challenge was the issue of learning a new language and culture. The Latinas had to overcome cultural differences, find employment, raise their children, and deal with discrimination and a way of life that they only faintly understood. But they maintained both a strong identity as Latinas as well as the ability to adapt to their new environment.

Conclusions: Latinas were restrained by language, culture, and discrimination and worried about their children's adaptation. The local community did not recognize their contributions, especially the labor they provided, but also largely unrecognized were their contributions to the ethnic diversity of that growing city. Latinas added ethnic foods, festivals, music, and maybe most of all their determination to make it in America. Despite adversity, however, most Latinas saw success in their effort to make Des Moines their home.

Recommendations: More opportunities for learning English needed to be made available as well as centralized location for immigrating Latinas to be able to find useful information about laws, how to attain citizenship, and an array of issues critical to émigrés. Finally, cultural exchanges with the non-Latino community needed to be made available to enhance the life of all.

Table of Contents

Chapter Page

1. INTRODUCTION 1

Significance of the Study 4

Problem Statement 6

Research Objective 6

Limitations 6

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE 8

Language and Culture 8

Segregation 9

Self Identity 10

Role of Women in the Family 10

Home and Mother 11

Friend and Interdependence 11

Domestic Violence 11

Children and Elderly 12

Education 13

College 14

Cultural Identity 15

Discrimination 15

Diversity within Hispanic Cultures 16

Physical Appearance 17

Health Care 17

Birth Control 18

Work 18

Going Back and Forth 19

Academic Immigrant 20

Immigration Reforms 20

Crossing the Borders 21

Assimilation 21

Celebrations 23

Social Lives of Latinas 24

Politics 25

Impact of Latinas 26

Religion 27

Media 28

Police 28

Survival 28

3. METHODOLOGY 29

Source of Data 29

Criteria for Selection 29
Identifying Subjects 30
Pilot Study 32
Interview Questions 32
Data Collection 34
Coding and Analysis 35
Data Presentation 35
Confidentially 36
Validity and Reliability 36
4. FINDINGS: WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU HERE? 40
Ten Latin American Countries 40
Cuantos Anos? 41
But I Am Cute 41
Latina, Hispanic, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Mexican, Guatemalan, What's in a Name? 44
My Expectations are High 46
The Neighborhood, Not the *Barrio* 48
Coming to Gringo Land 52
How and Why Did They Find Des Moines? 56
Going, Coming, Going, Staying 60
5. FINDINGS: YOU'RE IN THE U.S. SPEAK ENGLISH 63
English the Key to a Locked Door 63
Dos Lenguas 70

6. FINDINGS: DAY TO DAY, *LA VIDA* 81

Solo Dio Sabe para Quien Trabaja

(Only God knows for whom you work) 81

School or Babies 103

Catholic? 117

What Health Insurance? 125

Como es la Vida, Asi es la Muerte (As there is life, so there is death)....129

Freedom 130

Not Your Bodegas 137

Drug, Gangs, Deportation 142

7. FINDINGS: SPOUSE, BOYFRIEND, FAMILY 146

Latinas Marry Forever, My Divorce Was Unusual 146

Mi Madre, Mi Familia 156

8. FINDINGS: THE PUBLIC LIVES OF LATINAS 167

I Voted 167

Music, Dancing, and Friends 171

The *Calavera* vs The Jack-O'- Lantern 176

I Have Met Some Really Nice People 182

9. FINDINGS: BLENDING IN AND STANDING OUT 188

Hey Neighbor, Tacos? 188

I Don't Want to Lose Who I Am 194

Hug, Kiss, Kiss 200

A Matter of Color 210

10. FINDINGS: GETTING HERE AND FINDING AWAY TO STAY......227
The Border 227
The INS 229
Immigration....233
11. FINDINGS: LIFE IN THE HYPHEN 249
So Totally Alone, Totally 249
I Think I Am Happy....256
You Don't Dance Here 260
Las Esperanzas y Suenos (Hopes and Dreams)....265
We Provide Good Food 269
Needs and Recommendations....275
12. DISCUSSION 290
What to Be Called? 290
Language....291
Marriage and Cultural Issues 292
Divorce....292
Work 293
Segregation 293
Shopping 294
Holiday and Celebrations....294
Driving 294
Assimilation and Acculturation 295
Isolation....296

Family 296

Children and Elderly 296

Education 297

Age 298

Back and Forth 298

Crossing the Border 298

Discrimination 299

Physical Characteristics 300

INS 300

Immigration 300

Friends 301

Social Activities 301

Single Latinas 301

Impact 301

Religion 302

Celebrations 302

Health Care 303

Domestic Violence 303

Politics 303

Media 304

Police 304

Summary 304

13. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS 309
Summary 309
Conclusions 313
Recommendations 316
Implications 319
REFERENCES 322

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in South Sioux City, Nebraska, at that time an Anglo blue-collar midwestern town. When I was in grade school a large meat packing plant was built and several Mexican families were recruited to move to the area for employment. As I grew up, the numbers of Latinos increased. I remember as a child seeing many families with children, but none came to school. In fact, a few years later, as the number of Hispanics increased, the meat packing plant developed a small Latino village located behind the building. The village was built with small adobe looking homes and a very tall (20-foot) gated fence. We were always segregated from the Latinos in my hometown, but I did not know why. I still don't. I never had the chance to meet any of them.

As time went on, South Sioux City changed from being a predominantly Anglo community to a very diverse town. The Hispanic population grew dramatically; the library and post office postings were in Spanish, and English was often not spoken or heard. Signs in many stores and restaurants were in Spanish only and not English.

Unfortunately, even 25 years later, the people of South Sioux City were still segregated. Hispanic and Anglos lived as if they were two communities. In talking to teachers, there were still low numbers of Hispanic kids in high school. It appeared that after all this time South Sioux City had not pulled together as a common community. When talking to people that I knew as a child there was no interest in or opportunity to get to know the Hispanics in their town. The two communities had very little understanding about each other's cultures and continued to stay segregated.

Des Moines, Iowa seemed to be in a similar situation. A large and growing Hispanic population appeared hidden and segregated from the rest of the non-Hispanic community. There was a lack of understanding of what it meant to be Latino in Des Moines. In fact, Des Moines had little information on its Hispanic residents, although they had been a part of this city for at least 75 years. Des Moines's residents generally did not know where the Latinos who moved to this community came from, what they needed, why and how they chose Des Moines, if they would retire here, or what could be done to make this community a better place for their children and themselves.

The 2000 census indicates the Latino population in the United States grew by 58% since 1990 to 35.3 million, while the over-all populace has grown by just 13.2 %. (McCormick, 2001) Latinos are projected to be the largest minority in the country by the year 2005, and by the year 2050 nearly one quarter of the total population will be Latino. Hispanic growth is expected to account for almost half of all the population growth in the United States between 1998 and 2010. At this rate the Hispanic population will increase by 62% by the year 2050. Currently Hispanics account for about 12.5 % of the total United States residents. The Midwest region from Indianapolis to Minneapolis-St Paul is the fourth most populous region of Hispanics.

According to the 1990 census, there were approximately 33,000 Latinos in Iowa. The most recent census indicates that 82,473 Hispanics lived in Iowa in 2000, an increase of 150%. In 1998, 15,698 Hispanics were living in Polk County alone (Burke, 1999).

There were few studies found on the Hispanic population in Iowa, much less for Des Moines. It had been 24 years since the division for Latino affairs completed its last study for the general assembly in 1979. The division was given only $10,000 and six months to study the entire state population of Latinos. Subsequently, Ricardo Pabon, chairman for the Governor's task force on Spanish speaking Iowans, requested an additional year and $45,000 to complete the study. Although the request was not granted, the study was completed.

The study, called "The Hispanic: A Missing Link in Public Policy," derived information that could have been written today. It stated that non-Hispanics consistently made several assumptions about Latinos. Latinos were seen as migrant workers, transient, foreign, and, in general, a problem population (defined as poor, uneducated, and welfare recipients). Nevertheless, in 1975 the researchers felt they had accomplished three things by completing the study. First, the investigation showed that Hispanics were not recent immigrants to Iowa; many families were third and fourth generation residents. Second, the report stated that Latinos were victims of racism, economically exploited, and often seen as scab laborers rather than as future citizens. Hispanics were also seen as backward, dependent people rather than ambitious and hardworking, as foreigners rather than potential contributing citizens. Finally, and on a positive note, the study showed the ability of Latinos to thrive even in difficult environments.

However, the study also made a supposition about assimilation that should be analyzed from a different perspective. The assertion was made that Spanish-speaking people had not assimilated to the degree experienced by other immigrant groups in Iowa. This conclusion was reached because Latinos were speaking Spanish and maintaining customs from their countries of origin. Assimilation means to disregard all aspects of the migrant's native culture and demands total adaptation to the host society. I would suggest that perhaps the Hispanics were acculturating. Acculturation is a more gradual process in which immigrants shift attitudes and behavior toward those of the dominant culture without disregarding their own culture as a result of repeated exposure. Acculturation is experienced as a series of changes and choices, which include new ways to live, eat, speak, and maintain relationships with friends and family. With acculturation it does not matter whether or not the immigrants adhere to patterns of behavior known before in the country of origin.

In 1999, the time had arrived to find out what it meant to be a Latino in Des Moines. Were Latinos going through acculturation? Were Hispanics segregating? Was racism still an issue for Latinos? How were Hispanic children doing in school? Could Latinos find housing? What was the environment like for Latinos? These were just a few questions that needed answers. As a researcher I felt the more knowledge people had about their Latino neighbors, the more likely they would find common bonds. Thus we could be a united community.

Much could be studied about the Latino population, but my research focused on Latino women. I chose Latinas because I felt that there was an even greater paucity of research and less understanding of the lives of Latino women in Des Moines than of the Hispanic population as a whole. Latinas have had to struggle not only to overcome racial animosity, but gender inequality as well. Who are the Des Moines Latinas? Why are they here? Where did they come from? What is their story? And what do they need to succeed?

The Significance of the Study

This research served several diverse audiences in different ways. First, the research was intended to serve immigrant Latinas by showing them they are not alone. Because Hispanic culture seems to be patriarchal in orientation, less chance had been given for Latinas' voices to be heard. Therefore, it was even more important that Latino women's stories be told so they could influence the future for Latinas who would follow these women to Des Moines. The study would do this by illustrating how needs and issues had been addressed by Latinas who are already making their homes in Des Moines. The study would act as a pathfinder to help Hispanic women living in a new country.

Second, this study was intended to inform government officials and policy makers who may have had inadequate information on Hispanics and their needs. As policy makers gain information, service needs could be identified and problems addressed. School boards may find the need for translators in schools or bilingual education. Local government could find that adequate and affordable medical and dental services were not reaching this community.

Third, the study was intended to have significance for the State Public Policy Group, Inc., which was working with several community groups to begin a broad study on Latinos in Central Iowa. Tom Slater, CEO of the State Public Policy Group, expressed interest in the research gained from this investigation, as it would add a new dimension to his organization's studies. This study may add specific information on a group that is very often overlooked when Hispanics in general are researched.

Fourth, the study would help to preserve and even encourage the telling of immigrant stories. This was important because these stories would preserve a part of their--and our--history. In fact, prior to the 1960s Chicano movement, many traditions and stories were lost. The loss was due to the force of assimilation into the mainstream. It was important to capture the personal histories of the Latino community so that the immigrant experience was not lost for later generations. Certainly it was important to Latinos to preserve their customs, language, and memoirs that they brought with them to this country.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study was to describe the lives, thoughts, and dreams of immigrant Latino women living in Des Moines. Specifically, this study describes what it was like for Latino women to live in a second culture, what their needs were, and what recommendations they had for future accommodations for Latino women immigrants.

Research Objectives

The research objectives for this study were to describe when, how, and why selected immigrant Latino women came to live in Des Moines. The study was designed to discover what life was like in Des Moines as an immigrant Latino woman. Similarly the study hoped to elicit from Latino women their advice to future Hispanic women immigrants concerning what needs to be conveyed to the larger Des Moines community about Hispanic culture, and their recommendations for public and community policy needed to support immigrant women and families living in Des Moines.

Limitations

The study was comprised only of women. The study was only on Latino women in Des Moines, Iowa. This is not a broad inquiry on Latino women and no generalizations will be made from this exploration beyond what the reader feels is appropriate. The intent of this research was to inform other people in similar circumstances and to inform the broad community of ordinary citizens, policy makers, and those who influence policy about the world of the Latina living in Des Moines, at least as seen by 24 knowledgeable Latino women. It does not necessarily address immigrant life in small, rural communities nor does it address issues as seen by male Hispanics or second, third, or fourth generations Hispanics living in Des Moines.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Latinos were in the United States long before the United States was a country; however the larger Anglo community does not recognize this fact. Novas (1998, p. XII), feels, in fact, that "most Americans who are not Hispanic know very little about Latinos even with the large population growth, especially their history and culture." Latinos have struggled to find a place in U.S. life.

Language and Culture

Protecting and shaping Latino culture and language is part of what the Latinas' encounter to become a part of U.S. society. Acuana states that, "the right to maintain a bilingual-bicultural heritage" (Acuna, 1988, p. 386) , is of great importance to Latinos. During the 1960s there was a movement by Chicanos to preserve their mestizo culture that is both European and Indian. Lopez states, "It became important during those years to preserve the Spanish language and many of the traditions that were being lost as the force of assimilation led more and more into the mainstream culture" (Lopez, 1993, p. 6) . Language and the ability to speak English is an ongoing topic for Latinos in the United States. Speaking Spanish is seen both as a way to preserve and raise awareness of Latino culture. "No issue so clearly puts Hispanic American at odds with English speaking white or black as this question of language" (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 206) . "The mere sound of Spanish offends and frightens many English-only speakers, who sense in the language a loss of control over what they regard as their country" (Perea, 1998, p. 583) . It can be a source of conflict for Latinos too. If they speak Spanish they are suspected of not assimilating into U.S. society. On the other hand, if a Latina speaks English, she may feel she has abandoned her Hispanic roots. Martinez feels that, "being denied the right to speak Spanish is an old form of racism that has plagued Latinos for decades" (Martinez, 1998, p. 78) . Language can cause a chasm between Latinos and non-Latinos.

However, the ability to survive in U.S. society depends largely on the ability to communicate. Melendez offers, "Many see lack of English language fluency and skills as the primary impediment to Latino economic advancement" (Melendez, 1998, p. 122) . In fact, a construction worker states, "If you speak the language that's your first step to making it. You can't advance without knowing the language" (Stepick, Grenier, Morris, & Draznin, 1997, p. 273) .

The ability to speak English for a Latina comes with its issues.

> Monolingual Spanish speakers clearly have difficulty in functioning in a society which is monolingually English. Not so obvious is the stress of being bilingual, the stress of moving back and forth between the different worlds that each language represents. (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 84)

Segregation

Part of the issue for Latinos and Latinas not learning English is segregation from other communities. If Latinas live and work with only Latinos they will not learn English. "The persistent use of Spanish in part reflects the historical isolation of large segments of this population" (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 84) . The more education and a better job, the more likely a Latino will speak English. "Higher income people and those living in mixed neighborhoods are more likely to speak English" (p. 84) . Consequently, the segregation issue becomes more important to understand because it becomes indicative of how successful or not Hispanics are in non-Latino culture. Furthermore, Hispanics, especially the second generation, are speaking English.

> Statistics on language show that usage of English by Latinos is increasing. Further, children show a decided preference for English over Spanish, with U.S. born children of Spanish speaking parents overwhelmingly choosing English as their principal or only language. (Heyck, 1994, p. 2)

Self Identity

Language is only part of the cultural issue. Latinas struggle to become both recognized citizen of the United States and yet remain Hispanic. The decision to become an American citizen is a cultural issue and a part of the Latino self-identity. The Latino also wants the right to be a Hispanic culturally. "Their quest for culture is not necessarily separatist; it is actually a quest for multiple paths, the freedom to be both Latino and American" (Flores & Benmayor, p. 53) . It is not only important for Latinos to preserve the language but their social customs as well.

Role of Women in the Family

The issue of Latino culture and Latinas is very complicated and traditionally orientated to the family. "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of the commitment to the value system than men. If a woman does not renounce herself in favor of the male she is selfish" (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 39) . Latina culture is shifting slowly. Some Latinas have entered college and are finding careers. But, "Educated or not the onus is still on woman to be a wife/mother. Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children" (p. 39) . According to Diaz-Guerrero, the role of women in the Mexican family is primarily that of a self-sacrificing mother yielding to the supremacy of the father" (Diaz-Guerrero, 1975, p. 73) . Motherhood is a central part of the Latinas life, it is her main role to play in Latino society. Riddle feels, "Chicanas/ Latinas may not want to deny their culture but they are constrained by it. They have their own internal struggles over the role motherhood plays in their lives yet very few readily forego motherhood" (Riddell, 1993, p. 185) .

Home and Mother

Again Latino culture is changing. Increasingly, new research indicates the decision making in the Mexican American family is becoming more egalitarian. Certainly there is caution with this conclusion as it can be more of a class and not a cultural issue. In the U.S. Latinas do have power within the home. Espin feels, "Latin women experience a unique combination of power and powerlessness which is characteristic of the culture" (Espin, 1992, p. 142) . Rodriguez says,

> The Chicana's influence filters into her relationship with the children--giving rise to a closely knit group of mothers and children. The mother is recognized as an important figure in the home especially by children. The family is the most important institution for Chicanos and the women in turn is the backbone of the culture and her domestic role is not passive. (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 79)

Friends and Interdependence

Another component of Latina culture is interdependence of others, i.e., you value yourself by others.

> Independence at the cost of giving up the cultural value of interdependence and relationship to others is simply not a Mexican-American goal. Personality is defined by the community of which the individual is a part. Identity is defined in relationship to others: not to belong to a group is not to exist (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 77) .

Domestic Violence

For Latinas, cultural issues confronting domestic violence need to be addressed. Latinas are faced with a barrage of interacting events such as in assimilation, under education, employment and economic stress that can conclude to domestic violence. But the Latina also faces abuse because the culture allows it. Flores-Ortiz explains,

> Latinas who are battered tend not to leave their partners or husbands for very long. The cultural pull to return give him another chance and preserve the family is very strong for Latinas. If she has financial, social, legal resources to separate and seek safety she will still need to contend with the feelings of cultural and familial disloyalty that will come as a result of her actions, since she has been raised to put herself and her needs last. To end the violence, Latinos must confront and understand the historical and cultural roots of their oppression and seek cultural solutions to the problems of abuse (Flores-Ortiz , 1993, p. 176) .

Children and Elderly

Hispanic children are in the middle of the cultural tug and pull. Children are caught between two worlds and this conflict sometimes has a devastating affect such as, "recruitment into Mexican gangs and school dropout " (Trueba, 1998, p. 259) . If schools and communities do not address the needs of Hispanic children, the chances of failing school are dramatic. Latinos dropout of school, says Trueba, because of, "experiences of discrimination, verbal and physical abuse on the part of mainstream children and the predominate opinion among teachers that Latino children are low achievers" (p. 259) . On the other hand, children often get ahead of their parents in adopting the new country's behavior and language. "Some children are racing ahead of their parents in absorbing American ways but are turning into unemployable delinquents" (Suro, 1999, p. 51) . There is a theory that if immigrant children hold on to their parent's values and ethnic traits they will do better in the long run "than those who assimilate rapidly developing cynical attitudes toward school and a rejection of low wage labor" (p. 51) . Latino families have gone back to their country to salvage a child they feel has become morally corrupt. "There are cases in which the entire family returns to Mexico in order to reeducate teenagers in family values" (Trueba, 1998, p. 260) .

Latinas worry about children who are unhappy, don't fit in, or decide that they would rather work than go to school. Because jobs can be hard to get, young Latinos become prime targets for drug dealers.

> There are a lot of kids who come up here with the idea that they are going to get jobs and make money and the easiest work to find often the only work they can find is to sign up with the (drug) dealers (Suro, 1999, p. 194) .

The attitude toward elderly in Hispanic families is changing in the U.S. The belief has been that Latinos always take care of their of elderly. Torrez believes this is a myth.

> Extended families include parents, children and other kin who reside in the same household and share economic resources. Although it is true that some Mexican American elderly live in extended families most elderly do not (Torrez, 1996, p. 87) .

In fact, public services for older Latinos are needed. Sadly, most older Hispanics do not know what is available so services are not being accessed.

Education

Education is important to Hispanic parents. "In fact some children are sent back to Mexico for their elementary education if their experience in American schools is unproductive" (Trueba, 1998, pp. 265-266) . At the same time, Latinos are dropping out of high school at a faster rate than other groups. "The proportion of Latinos who graduated from high school is declining, from 62.9 % in 1985 to 54.5 % in 1990" (Heyck, 1994, p. 2) . One possible explanation of this issue is the tiny number of Latinos teaching school. Summarily, a reasonable explanation for a high number of dropouts is teaching children who only speak Spanish in English-only schools. Sanchez concedes "that one of the causes for the high dropout rate for Mexican Americans was their inability to speak English" (Sanchez 1989, p. 261) . Suro offers that very few Latino immigrants arrive with enough education to be able to break out of poverty. Today's U.S. economy is knowledge based and people with an education get ahead while those who do not have one remain poor. "Their children, like the children of all poor people, face the greatest economic pressures to drop out and find work. When they do stay in school the education they receive is for the most part poor" (Suro, 1999, p. 19) . And according to Ginorio and Huston,

> U. S. schools do not meet the needs of Americas fastest-growing minority population-Latinas. The Latino community, family needs and peer pressure often clash with school expectations for Latinas. For example, many Latinas face pressure about going to college from boyfriends and fiancées who expect their girlfriends or future wives not to be too educated (Ginioro and Huston, 2000, p. 1) .

College

Some authors feel there is a small rise in the percentage of Latinos going to college. Dr. Shirley Soto's discussion of higher education makes a significant point when she writes that Latinas are under-represented in higher education. Dr. Soto, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at California State University, Northridge feels institutions failed to address the cultural needs of Chicanas and that there is a continued, negative stereotyping. "Chicanas, she wrote, "faced economic, cultural and sexual oppression" (Soto, 1995, p. 177) .

There are Latinas who have gone to college and then on to careers. They learned to assimilate into the U.S. and had been supported by their families. Family support had been critical for a Latina's success in going on with her education. "Emotional support from their families is critical to the success of these high achieving Chicanas. This support is coupled with a high degree of knowledge of the dominant culture" (Segura, 1999, p. 69) . Mothers play a tremendous role in getting Latinas to higher education. Segura in fact states, " mother encouragement to do well in school is essential for the success of Chicanas in higher education" (p. 70) .

Cultural Identity

Compared to other minorities, a dilemma that Hispanics faced was what to be called. There are several arguments for any title like Latino, Hispanic, or simple Guatemalan or Honduran or Mexican. One argument from Garcia is, "One of the reasons they favor Latino rather than Hispanic is that they associate the latter with Spain" (Garica, 2000, p. 17) . Garza states in her book, "Call them Latinas but you will be using a shortcut word for many different groups of women" (Garza, 1994, p. 11) . Stavans adds,

> terms may seem interchangeable, Hispanic and Latino. The latter is preferred by conservative, the former is used when the talk is demographic, education, urban development drugs and health the latter on the other hand is the choice of liberal and is frequently used to refer to artist, musicians and movie stars (Stavans, 1995, p. 24) .

Any book on Latinos and Hispanics will have a discussion on what to call people from Latin America now living in the U.S. The literature agrees that there is not a single correct title to call Hispanics. Latinos themselves do not agree on a single title, but the most correct name would be to address the individual by their country of origin such as Honduran or Mexican.

Discrimination

Latinos are and have been subjected to discrimination, coupled with anti immigration and xenophobia. There is an "enduring sentiment held by a number of Americans that Spanish speakers are illiterate, impoverished, dirty, backward, criminally inclined, residually Roman Catholic, dark complexion and now pushing cocaine and marijuana for all they are worth" (Gonzalez, Vasquez, & Bichsel, 1992, p. 152) . Castaneda notes that in parts of the U.S. Mexicans are considered "non-white" (Castaneda, 1989, p. 242) . The issue is color,

> Mexican physical features including color keep them at the bottom and the darker they are the lower they are. The culture of color was imposed and remains. A perfectly tailored suit and Gucci shoes will not save a Latino professional from a racist policeman (Martinez, 1998, p.18) .

Nevertheless, the issue of discrimination by color that continues today was also found in Latin America.

> A racial system whereby whiter skin was directly related to higher social class and honor, while darker skin was associated both with the physical labor of slaves and tributary indians and visually with the infamy of the conquered
> (Oboler, 1997, p. 34) .

Furthermore, discrimination is not limited to the whites. Black and Latinos have a history of mistrust and discrimination towards each other. "Many African Americans believe Latinos aspire to be white, while Hispanics regard blacks obsessed with race. And a good number especially among Mexican Americans, even harbor deep prejudice toward blacks" (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 184) .

Diversity within Hispanic Cultures

individuals in the U.S. see all Latinos as if they were a single group with no dimensions. Casteneda observed, "Despite internal diversity Mexicans are stereotyped by Anglos as being essentially all the same" (Casteneda, 1989, p. 242) . Fox states, "The people lumped together as Hispanics start out with just two things in common: their Spanish speaking heritage and the fact they are lumped together as Hispanics" (Fox, 1996, pp. 178-179) . And, in fact, "The Hispanic/Latino community in the United States and outside does not share anything in common" (Garcia, 2000, p. 22) . There are no common properties to link Peruvians with Mexicans with Hondurans with Ecuadorians. In fact, Garcia makes the point there is no Latin American.

> There is no Latin America. There is only a group of countries and very different societies, which as wholes have nothing in common. The denomination Latin America just like the denomination of Hispanic or Latina/o has been imposed by persons or groups of persons for whom it is convenient to lump together the countries or peoples from this part of the world (Garcia, 2000, p. 21) .

Most Americans saw Latinos and particularly Mexicans to be non-American foreigners even if they had been U.S. born. Castenda wrote, "It makes no difference in the Southwest whether a member of this group is or is not an American citizen. He is still a Mexican" (Castenda, 1989, p. 242) .

Physical Appearance

Physical appearance is important and valued by Latina women. Hispanic women will comment on features of others, noting skin tone. The literature suggests that Latinas are highly influenced by what is characterized as beautiful. One writer expressed, "Chicanas know they are not valued as beautiful women, especially if they are dark or heavy. The label beautiful is reserved for tall, lean, blond, blue-eyed women. Generally Chicanas are neither tall, blonde, nor blue eyed" (Blea, 1997, p. 153) .

> Whether women have fair or dark skin and hair bears upon how Chicanas will be treated. Although some change is occurring regarding the preferred body image our society still values images of women who are white and blond in particular and who have European features. Research shows those women with darker skin tones and have indigenous features face more discrimination (Zavella, 1997 p. 190) .

Health Care

Health care access is a critical issue for Latinas. Latinas, "as member of the total Hispanic population have less health care coverage than all other ethnic/racial groups in the United States" (Riddell, 1993, p. 191) . Torre states,

> Given the poverty status of Latinas and their occupational location in the labor force, lack of health insurance has become the key factor in limiting their access to care. For Latinas who are often concentrated in the small labor markets health insurance is virtually nonexistent (Torre, 1993, p. 162) .

For Latinas and their children, especially those who do not speak English and who are undocumented and without health insurance, finding health care can be a struggle. There are often free clinics that will provide some care but often "there is no continuity with doctors and non emergency needs are put on hold though they may be serious" (Basu, 2000, p. 11) . There are efforts to get health care to Latinos. Volunteers who do not care if there is health insurance or documents often run this health care system. In rural Iowa a clinic run by volunteers "tries to help everyone who seeks medical care but sometimes it is difficult" (O'Brian, 2001, p. 3B) .

Birth Control

Access to birth control mirrors health care. Given the fact that Latinas have had poor access to health care and health insurance, and a cultural bias also against birth control. Birth control information has not been accessible to Latinas. Latinas have been excluded "from access to information, services and decision making in the area of reproductive technology policy making" (Riddell, 1993, p. 190) .

Work

Working outside the home has been another cultural issue that Latinas have had to address. Hispanic women have a greater chance of being able to work outside the home in the U.S. where there are fewer sanctions against women in the work force. A Mayan women explains, "Back in Cristobol women work but only within the family, never outside, never for money" (Suro, 1999, p. 33) . The desire to work outside the home is most often driven by economic reasons.

> Many Mexican women entered the labor force in the U.S. because they could not survive on men's earnings or because they had been abandoned by their partner. For those married the traditional ideology that cast men in the role of bread winner had to be jettisoned in the U.S. because families were not able to make it on one income (Repack, 1997, p. 248) .

Latinas who have come to the U.S. without the benefit of an education or language skill are often found in low paying jobs that offer no benefits. Torres feels "the employment and occupation positions of Latinas mirrors their level of education attainment and immigrant status" (Torre, 1993, p. 162) .

Employers have, at times, taken advantage of Latinas, especially those who are not documented, sometimes not paying them or, worse, sexually abusing them. "Since most women were in the country illegally, and their bosses knew it, the women were often forced to endure low wages and constant sexual harassment by their supervisors" (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 158) .

Going Back and Forth

The decision to immigrate to the U.S. is not taken lightly. In fact, Latinos have historically gone back and forth between their country and the U.S.

A study by Pastor and Castaneda explains Latino immigrants in three categories:

> Short term emigrants who enter the U.S. for 10 to 12 weeks then return to Mexico, cyclical emigrants who leave their families in Mexico but stay in the U.S. for longer periods and return on a fairly regular basis and finally permanent emigrants who bring families with them and settle in the U.S. (Pastor & Castaneda, 1989,

pp. 318-319) .

The new immigrants do not want to become Americans nor cease being Mexicans, yet desire to have the best of both, to live as Mexicans in the U.S.

Academic Immigrant

Currently another type of immigrant is the emergence of the white collar Latinos, particularly Mexican. Pastor and Casteneda offer, "Those who previously spent time in the U.S. for academic reasons are now prolonging their stays or making them more or less permanent" (Pastor & Casteneda, 1989, p. 328) . Most white collar Latinos have left their country of origin for economic reasons, already speak English, and have acquired some assimilation already. With the economic crisis in Mexico, a few more middle class and professional women are also migrating to the U.S. These professional women have higher incomes and educational levels "in contrast to those women who migrated from rural underdeveloped areas in Mexico" (Zavella, 1997, p. 190) .

Immigration Reforms

The U.S. and its views toward immigrants, especially Latinos, is ever changing. The laws regarding immigrants have had many changes with varying effects at different political climates. An example was the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control act, which was meant to stop illegal immigration to the U.S., but had the opposite affect. Amnesties were created that allowed three million former illegal aliens to become citizens. In turn, they "have become host to about a million relatives who have lived in the U.S. illegally" (Suro, 1999, p. 23) . A 1996 law entitled the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant

Responsibility Act decreased illegal immigration and doubled the number of Border Patrol. But the law was enacted at a time when evidence showed that illegal immigrants did not cross the border but arrived, "legally by coming through airports and other entry points. About 125,000 people a year arrive with temporary visas as tourists or students and then remain illegally" (Suro, 1999, p. 99). However, this law also severely limited access of medical and social services to immigrants.

Crossing the Border

Crossing the border into the U.S. from Mexico is a dangerous process for Latinos and more so for Latinas. Though this border is technically between Mexico and the U.S., in reality "it is also the border between the United States and all of Latin America" (Fuentes, 1997, p. 160). Anzaldua claims, "Today thousands of Mexicans (Latinos) face crossing the border legally and illegally" (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 32). Many of the Latinos cross without the benefit of a bridge and either wade, swim, or float across the Rio Grand. Anzaldua also includes comments about the border patrol and the risk to Latinos of getting caught and deported.

> One of every three is caught. Some return to enact their rite of passage as many as three times in a day. Some of those who make it across undetected fall prey to Mexican robbers. The Mexican woman is especially at risk. Often the coyote (smuggler) doesn't feed her for days or let her go to the bathroom. Often he rapes her or sells her into prostitution. She cannot call on county or state health or economic resources because she does not know English and she fears deportation (p. 34).

Assimilation

Assimilation into the United States is also affected by the proximity of the U.S. to the native country.

> Mexican emigrants can come and go even after they have permanently settled in the U.S. This and the existence of a large Mexican community in the U.S. makes it possible to for emigrants to continue speaking Spanish, eating Mexican food, and living in a quasi-Mexican environment, which is not true of other immigrants from other countries. Mexicans are unique to have contiguity (Pastor & Castaneda, 1989, p. 324) .

Another issue is the "transformation of citizenship laws in Latin America, with governments increasingly allowing dual citizenship provisions that allow their nationals to retain home country rights even if they have become citizens" (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 186) .

Assimilation is a process over time where individuals take on the behaviors of their new host country. It is often a predictor of whether or not the immigrant will make the new host country his/her home. Self-identification is also a measure. Pastor and Castaneda claim, "If someone calls himself a Mexican he is likely to educate his children and vote differently than if he defines himself as a Mexican American" (Pastor & Castaneda, 1989, p. 355) . Speaking Spanish is also a measure of assimilation. The more integrated the more English and less Spanish the Latinos speak in the U.S. Pastor offers "Intermarriage is also widely regarded as the clearest measure of the extent of integration" (p. 356) .

The issues of acculturation and/or assimilation have further consequences for the Latina. One example is the wife who has become liberated but is married to a husband who holds on to the traditional Latino values. The Latinas have stress when "being forced to adhere to traditional values in a context where they are not accepted, valued or understood" (Rodriquez, 1994, p. 59) . Rodriequez feels religion can also create tension for assimilated Latinas. The church, which has a huge significance in a Latina's life, may no longer hold its importance to her and she may no longer belong to its organizations.

Furthermore, cultural changes may alter the way a Latina sees traditions, and may no longer participate in celebrations such as 15th birthday celebrations or value the relationships with godparents. Rodriquez feels that cultural awareness can decrease and increase a Latina's stress. Stress is increased because the Latina is forced to "face the inherent racism in the dominant culture, such as when her child is rejected for being darker than other children; when she faces discrimination due to language, accent, color or cultural expressions" (p. 84) . The decrease of stress comes by "being afforded the opportunity to choose the best from both cultures and languages and having extended family with support systems and celebration" (p. 84) .

Celebrations

Celebrations are indeed difficult for Latinas to deal with in a new country. The decision must often be made to either hold on to past rituals or acquire new ones. An older woman from Mexico was able to participate in a Mexican *posada* at the Christmas season. "The older woman talked about how she missed Mexican Celebrations and that her mother used to do them every year" (Zuniga, 2000, p. B) . Celebrations can be confusing for the host country and frustrating for the new immigrant. An example of this is the celebration for the Day of the Dead. "It represents a clash of pagan and Christian beliefs but its message of death as a continuance, not an end, can be uplifting" (Menard, 2000, p. 112) . Anglos can be put off with the *calavera*, a skeleton, the main symbol for the day. The skeletons remind people in the United States of death, but for the Latino the symbol is "still very much attached to the soul of the person who walked in it while alive and whose memory lives in the minds of relatives" (p. 112) . Many Latino holidays are based on religious origins. "Most holidays in the Hispanic world are centered around or have their origins in religion, and many celebrations of the Catholic Church are officially designated by governments as holidays" (Noble & Lacasa, 1991, p. 16) . One such holiday is the day of Epiphany, or the celebration of the three kings, the wise men.

> In Latino societies, the Epiphany is more meaningful than Christmas, and that message was delivered to the indigenous people by the priest in the sixteenth century. It was celebrated from Spain to the Dominican Republic, though among the United States Latinos however the tradition is waning (Menard, 2000, p. 158) .

Social lives of Latinas

The social lives of Latinas include friends, dance and music. Latin music was often described as a connection to Latino culture. Latinas felt connected to themselves with Latin music. The Latinas talked about how the words moved them and made them feel more alive. "For the deracinated children and grandchildren of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics on the U.S. mainland, the surge in popularity of Latin music has often been the main stimulus to re-identifying themselves with things Hispanic" (Fox, 1996, pp. 186-187) . Music expresses the depth of feeling Latinos have. Latino, "music serves many other functions than to provide joy and a sense of well being: it unites people, transmits social value, denounces injustices, influences human behavior and puts to sleep or awakens" (Villafane, 1994, p. 156) . The words used in Latino music were explained to be much more romantic and beautiful than non-Latino music.

Similarly, it is felt that to dance is to be Latino. Dancing is a favorite pastime for Latinas and in fact "Salsa dancing is hotter than ever" (Navarro, 2000, p. 1) . Currently there is a surge in popularity for Salsa dancing with Des Moines offering salsa music and dancing a couple of times a month. The respondents exclaimed dancing was a very important social aspect of being Latina.

Politics

Politics have a fervor with Latinas in the U.S.; their right to vote is highly regarded. Many Latina American countries immigrants have left are corrupt, and Latinas have lived "with regimes purportedly governed under liberal democratic constitutions but which, in fact, have been critically and often brutally distorted, perverted and manipulated" (Diamond, Hartlyn, & Linz, 1999, p. 24) . Politically, Hispanics have been seen as "the fastest growing block of ethnic voters in America" (Janofsky, 2000, p. 17) . In fact, in the 2000 presidential election, Democratic and Republican strategists agreed that Hispanics might have provided the swing votes in four states. Though Latinas themselves were not singled out as a voting block in the U.S., they made a huge impact in Mexico's 2001 election. Prior to the 2001 election in Mexico, a newspaper article stated that "presidential candidates in the midst of the most fiercely contest campaign in seven decades are courting the women's vote as never before. Record numbers are seeking elective office themselves" (Moore, 2000, p. 2) .

Participation of Latinas in politics has been slow to evolve. The literature shows the opportunity to vote for women came very late in most of Latin America; not until the late 1940s did women hve the right to vote, in Mexico 1953 and in Paraguay not until 1961.

Another issue addressed of Hispanics and politics is the number of Latinos who are in the U.S. who are affected by its policies but who cannot vote. "Hispanics have not yet fully translated their increasing number, into proportional increases in political representation and power because most are not eligible to vote because of their age or lack of citizenship" (Castaneda, 1995, p. 27) . There is a large number of undocumented Latinos who cannot vote, yet, are affected by what happens at the polls. There are many young Latinos who are also affected by policies towards Latinos but are not old enough to vote.

Impact of Latinos

Latino and Latina immigrations have had a greater impact on the U.S. than changing the political climate. The number of individuals from south of the border who work in the United States is great. Many of these Latinos work at jobs in the U. S. that would otherwise go unfulfilled. These individuals send money home supporting a family still in their native country. The literature states, "Income earnings in the U.S. provide significant cash flow to Mexico. It is estimated that the remittances sent to Mexico from wages in the U.S. are its second source of income" (Maciel & Herrera-Sobek, 1998, p. 5) . Although Hispanics are often blamed for taking jobs away from non-Latino workers, the reality is that Latinos "respond to the demands of the U.S. market and do the work that no one in the U.S. is willing to do" (Fuentes, 1997, p. 174) . "Mexican workers are filling certain employment categories that few North Americans are willing to do for minimum wage or less" (Maciel & Herrera-Sobek, 1998, p. 6) .

Latinos are accused of taking more than they give to communities but again Fuentes says, "Undocumented workers do not apply for welfare benefits. As consumers they pay taxes far in excess of any benefit in health care and education they may in fact receive" (Fuentes, 1997, p. 175) . "Mexican immigrants pay local, and in many cases, federal taxes for which they will never claim any benefits whatsoever" (Maciel & Herrera-Sobek, 1998, p. 6) . Hispanics have proven to be contributors on both a national and local economic level, giving much more than they take out. Another fact is "new jobs are created by the presence of new immigrants with their needs for basic goods and services" (Martinez, 1998, p. 64) .

Religion

Religion is a strong part of the Latina's life. The Latinas are also the primary carriers of the religious belief system, with a large percentage being Roman Catholic. However, "the very nature of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church and its teachings has called for women to be subordinate to men" (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 59) . Interestingly, this fact has not excluded them from playing an active role in the religion. Religion is overtly a part of the Hispanic culture. "For many people in the Hispanic community the religious world view is the only world view. They understand everything within a religious context. Thus, religion is a significant dimension of their human experience" (p. 59) . Religion for Latinos is " very much associated with the family traditions, practices and ritual events. It too is a family affair and is at the heart of nearly every family celebration" (Heyck, 1994, p. 94) . Because of this, religion is seen as more "popular than official, more emotional than theological based. But religion is also a very personal affair for Hispanics" (p. 94) . "The personal relationship that Latinos have with their religion most often takes place outside of their church, because they are more close to their popular beliefs than they are to the institutional churches" (p. 94) . Though most Latinos are Catholic, "Latino religious practices are not homogenous; rather they "express the great diversity of the Latino peoples" (p. 94) .

Many Latinos have made a choice to leave the Catholic Church. "The most important reason why Hispanics remain a people apart is that they are different from others in the U.S. church. Hispanics have been rejected outright. Hispanics are still discriminated against in the Church" (Sandoval, 1994, pp. 135-136) . Another part of the issue is that in the past the Catholic Church has sided with the rich and powerful. Yet another issue is, "*Machismo,* which sees the practice of religion as somehow unmanly, to be left to the woman and children" (p. 136) .

Media

The media plays a major role in how Latinos are portrayed. For the most part television and film do not show Latinos at all, "those few Latino characters who do make it to the screen are disproportionately unsavory" (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 214) .

Police

The topic of how police handle and work with Hispanics can be troubling. Of late there have been numerous articles published about racial profiling, a practice where police stop drivers based on race. For example, a newspaper article about this subject found that, "Hispanics have a much greater chance of being stopped by police in San Diego compared with whites" (Navarro, 2000, p. 16) .

Survival

One of most important characteristics of Latina immigrants is their ability to survive and

> To adapt in the face of arduous life circumstances of poverty and segregation. The role of Mexican women is at the heart of this resiliency. They are crucial to the maintenance of the home language and culture and complex binational infrastructure of networks and relationships (Trueba, 1998, p. 265) .

Latinas offer strengths and skills that are often untapped.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes how the study was carried out, detailing the sources of data, the criteria for selection and the identification of individuals. A pilot study was done as well to assure questions' clarity and validity. The interview questions are described in this section as well as how the data was collected, analyzed, and presented. A short description of confidentially, validity, and reliability concludes the chapter.

Source of Data

The study was conducted and data collected by doing in-depth interviews. Interviewing allowed the individuals' own perspective on their lives, experiences, and situations to be heard as Taylor and Bodgan (1998) suggested. The interviewing process was relaxed and conversational but with focused fixed questions that allowed for open responses, as suggested by Weiss (1994). Twenty-four Latino women from the Des Moines area were interviewed. The interview questions were open-ended, but the question-set was structured with each question asked of each respondent in order to gain perceptions of a similar broad range of everyday life. I asked the question and then let the respondent answer as I took notes and tape-recorded the answers. The interviews lasted from one to three hours.

Criteria for Selection

The criteria for the individuals who participated in the study included:

Individuals from Spanish speaking Latin American country who had moved to Des Moines and lived here for two or more years, spoke Spanish as their first language, and were at least 17 years old.

There were several reasons for the criteria. Interviewees must have lived here for at least two years to ensure knowledge of what it takes to live in a location different from their country of origin. The age requirement was to ensure that interviewees had some maturity and life experiences. The importance of Spanish being the primary language was to assure that the respondents had had the experience of living in a new home where they may not have been understood or did not understand and had had to deal with the frustration or fears it brought.

There were two exceptions to the study candidates. One Latina had lived in Des Moines for only one year. A second Latina was born on the U.S. side of the United States Mexican border in a non-English speaking Mexican family. Both Latinas grew up with Spanish as their primary language and met the spirit of the guidelines for selection in that their experiences in coming to Des Moines and living here provided insight to the study.

Identifying Subjects

Key informants, individuals who were knowledgeable about the Hispanic community, as suggested by Weiss (1994), were used to aid in identifying Latinas to interview. Key informants helped in the selection of Latinas who could be approached for the study. The key informants were Hispanic and non-Hispanic women that I had contact with and who were in contact with Latinas. My informants worked within the Hispanic community in various capacities. Beyond the initial informants, interviewees for the study were found by networking. I first asked my key informants for additional subjects and then asked my subjects for subjects using a snowballing effect, a method offered by Weiss (1994) . I was also able to find a club for Latinos where several members volunteered to be interviewed.

A volunteer translator was used for the interviewees who did not speak English. Questions asked for the study were asked in English translated into Spanish, answered in Spanish and translated back into English. The question was either accepted or reframed to insure for a more appropriate response.

The location of the interviews were either in the respondent's own homes, the interviewers home, a respondent's work place, or a third neutral location:--the translator's home. Separate locations such as Gatcheal Methodist church and Hispanic Resource Services were identified but not used. The key to the location was finding a place that allowed for comfort and privacy of the individual being interviewed. Times for the interviews were at the discretion, comfort, and convenience of my subjects. Either the interviewee or the translator determined the location for the interview. Five of the women chose to use the home office of the interviewer to talk. Eleven conversations took place in the Latina's homes, with six in the kitchen, one in the dining room, and the rest in living rooms. Six interviews where held at the workplace of the interviewee, one at the home of a translator, and one in the business owned by the Latina respectively.

Though the Latina was the only individual to participate in the interview, other individuals sometimes listened. Who attended the interview was at the sole discretion of the respondent. Fourteen women were alone with the interviewer. Three Latinas had translators and one was the daughter of the interviewee (the husband of this interviewee also came and went during the interview). One Latina had a husband listen and no children; another had her entire family sit in. Another Latina had her family at home but no one in the room as she spoke. One Latina had her infant son in the room with her during the interview and her husband came and went. Two Latinas had toddler age girls with them as they answered questions. Another Latina held a small infant as she spoke.

As the researcher, I strove for "empathic neutrality" (Patton, 1990, p. 55), where empathy was "a stance toward the people one encounters while neutrality was a stance toward the findings" (p. 58). I was nonjudgmental of my subjects and reported my findings as descriptively accurate and balanced as possible.

Pilot Study

Key informants reviewed questions that were to be asked of the respondents in order to ensure that the questions would be asked judiciously and appropriately. Originally I had 153 questions identified from the literature. With feedback from my informants I reduced the number to five broad, open questions. A woman from Cuba, for example, questioned the effectiveness of my original questions on voting and green card status. From another point of view a woman from Mexico felt it was important to ask about living in a second culture. The pilot interviews were retained and incorporated, contributing information to the study as well as serving to clarify the questions asked.

Interview Questions

The interview consisted of the following five questions or statements:

1. Describe when, how and why you came to live in the United States and particular Des Moines in particular.

The idea was to collect as much personal history as possible about the process of the Latina's arrival into Des Moines and to discover how old the Latina was when she arrived in Des Moines. The question explored, with prompting as necessary, what country she came from, whether or not she came with family, if she could speak any English, marital status, whether she came from a rural or urban environment, her education attainment, and her motivation for leaving her homeland.

2. Describe your life in Des Moines.

The statement was asked to determine what that person's life was like at the time of the interview. The idea of this question was to determine if she had a family, was married and if her spouse was Latino or other ethnic origin. I wanted to know if the Latinas or their family members mix with Anglos or only the Latino community. I wanted to determine whether the person owned or rented her home. I looked to see if the Latinas had gone to college and if they worked outside the home, as well as what church individuals belonged to and why. I desired to know if living in Des Moines was similar to or different than their country of origin, what the experiences had in common, and what was different about living in Des Moines. I investigated if the Latinas shopped at Hispanic owned stores and why or why not they did so. I asked if the respondent celebrated any Hispanic customs, and if so why and how? In general this statement looked at the acculturation process and sought to determine if Latinas blended into the larger community or stayed within the Latino society.

3. Describe what it is like to live in a second culture.

What was it like living in two cultures? What difficulties did the Latinas have? This question meant to probe into the issue of discrimination and whether or not the subjects perceived they had been treated differently because they were Latino. This question also looked at the impact the Latino community had on Des Moines. I wanted to know what concerns this person had about living in Des Moines.

4. How can the dominant Anglo community help Latinos who are new to this culture?

This question was asked to see what could be done or offered by the community at large to make immigrating to Des Moines easier or better. How could Des Moines offer a better quality of life for someone new to the culture? What does the Hispanic community need to be able to have a more integrated life in Des Moines? What should the larger community know about Des Moines' Hispanic culture? What do policy makers need to know about the Latinas' experience in order to make changes? And what did the Latinas interviewed have for recommendations to help the Latino community?

5. What did I not ask you that you feel would be important to include in the study?

This question was asked for any additional information that the interviewee felt was important and should be included in the study. This question included dreams and hopes for the future for themselves or their children. I felt this question gave the Latina an opportunity to have more voice within the study. This question also helped to fill any void that may have been missed with prior questions.

Data Collection

A tape recorder and physical notes were used to collect the data. Field notes included a narrative of the place of interview, non-verbal cues given, and a personal description of the individual. I created transcripts of the audiotapes. As researcher, I took notes of the interview to document personal reactions to the interviews.

Coding and Analysis

I worked and coded the data first by asking the questions, then cutting and pasting text from those questions into codes, a method suggested by Bryman and Burgess (1994) . I then identified themes and concepts as I read the responses as done by Taylor and Bodgan (1998) . The data were "organized, synthesized and patterns searched" (Bogdan & Bilklen, 1982, p. 145) . I looked for reoccurring statements or words known as markers in the results as labeled by Weiss (1994) . Coding took place as words and statements or markers repeated themselves in the transcripts of the tape recordings and field notes. I took like-minded data, synthesized this data to form and develop major codes and then established themes.

Analysis is narrative and domain. Narrative because I looked at what the individual said, what her story was, and how she choose to tell it (Riessman, 1993) ; domain because I looked at "the social situation and cultural patterns as they arose, moving between cultural and environmental situations to incident specific statements" (Spradley, 1979, pp. 207-210) . The analysis took the form of a descriptive account using the words of the Latino women telling their stories.

Data Presentation

The presentation of data analysis corresponded to questions asked in the interviews. These were added to or modified by themes that emerged from the data collected in the interviews. An example of the themes was what is the public life of Latinas in Des Moines?

The themes and codes were then translated from a conceptual piece into a written presentation that can be read by others. "The research report is an account that closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57) .

I felt that it was important that the report be a useful guide for the future of the Latino community, Des Moines and the state of Iowa. "A good qualitative study can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, p. 58, 1991) "Guides call our attention to aspects of the situation or place we might otherwise miss" (Eisner, 1991, p. 59) .

Confidentiality

I protected the confidentially of my respondents and was the custodian of the information they shared. The subjects were given a consent form and all information was private and respected.

The questions of the study were reviewed and approved by the Human Review Committee of Drake University. The committee found that the questions asked of the interviewees were not overly intrusive. The results of the interviews were properly safeguarded.

Validity and Reliability

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) made the case that in qualitative research validity and reliability become so intertwined as to be all but inseparable. For the purposes of this study, validity addressed the issue of truth--establishing trustworthiness--this way: does the research accurately reflect the results and the conclusions drawn from the findings?

Reliability asks the question of whether another researcher studying the same topic in the same geographic area and using the same procedures would have similar results (Gall et all., 1996) .

Krefting states, " A qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that people who share that experience would immediately recognize the descriptions" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216) . The researcher reviewed the findings of this research with interviewees as well as with a group of Latinos who were not a part of the study. The outside Latinos were a group of Hispanics all working for the same company who meet on a regular basis to discuss issues affecting the Latino population. These checks confirmed information in the findings.

Procedures suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to determine whether or not a study is valid and reliable included keeping extensive written records of raw field notes. The researcher collected field notes containing information such as the following: where the interview took place, who was in attendance, what color of clothing the respondent wore, what the location looked like, the attitude of the interviewee, and what was the agenda or motivation of the interviewee to talk to the interviewer.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advised, where possible, taping each interview and typing verbatim transcripts. The researcher in this study recorded all 24 interviews and had exacting transcripts made of each interview.

The researcher has made any and all notes and tapes available to her advisor and to the doctoral committee as requested. These written and taped records served as the primary criteria for the chair to audit the findings on an independent and random basis. The purpose of the audit was to (a) affirm the number of interviews, (b) affirm that the content was described accurately and (c) to assure that the analyses were justified (Lincoln & Guba 1985) .

Ratcliff (1995) felt that reliability was found in qualitative research by multiple listening and multiple transcriptions of audio tapes by the same persons or different people. The recordings of these interviews were listened to multiple times by the same transcribers. The transcripts were reread multiple times by the researcher. One audio tape was transcribed two times by two different transcribers to make sure transcribing would be accurate and consistent.

Ratcliff (1995) felt qualitative research was validated by the use of extensive quotations from transcripts and field notes. Direct quotes were used extensively from the interviews in the findings.

Another issue with validity and reliability was the researcher bias because the researcher was the instrument in which the data was collected and studied. Brody states, "open disclosure of preconceptions and assumptions that may have influenced data gathering and processing becomes an inherent part of the conduct of the inquiry" (Brody, 1992, p. 179) . Greene explains, " it is precisely the individual qualities of the human inquirer that are valued as indispensable to meaning construction," (Greene, 1994, p. 539) . Bias was not something to avoid but to review and make note of. The researcher explored her bias towards Latinas prior to the interviews taking place. For example such issues of bias as all Latinas were Catholic, Latinos did not get divorced, and that most interviewees immigrated to the U.S. for economic reasons were noted by the researcher.

"Consistency is most often associated with reliability or replicabilty" (Thomsen, McCoy, & Williams, 2000, p. 4). The same questions in this research were asked in each interview to every respondent.

Qualitative researchers want the range and variety of human experiences as a part of their study. "Rather than controlling variability, qualitative researchers seek insight by exploring as much variation in experiences as possible. We refer to this as dependability" (Thomsen et al., 2000, p. 4) . With this study the interviewer tried to pry from each interview as many variables as was possible from each respondent.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS: WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU HERE?

The Latinas who immigrated to Des Moines were of various ages and physical characteristics, from different countries and settings, and lived in scattered neighborhoods with different attitudes. Some of the interviewees would make the decision to stay in Des Moines, others would decide to eventually leave.

Ten Latin American Countries

The respondents came from various countries and settings. The 24 interviewees came from 10 different Latin American countries. Twelve were from Mexico, 2 each from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras, and 1 each from Cuba, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Argentina, and the United States border.

The interviewees had lived in both urban and rural settings in their countries. Prior to their arrival in the United States, four came from rural or farming areas, two from farms in the Michoacan area of Mexico, one from the rural town of Santiago Papasquiaro, Mexico, and another lived on a farm near the city of Leon, Mexico. Six individuals came from Mexico City, the largest city in Mexico and the capitol. Two persons came from Guadalajara, Mexico, the second largest city, and eight Latinas came from the capitol cities of their countries including Havana, Cuba; Guatemala City, Guatemala; and Managua, Nicaragua. Two each were from large cities such as Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Lima, Peru; Buenos Aires, Argentina; San Salvador, El Salvador. Two respondents came from larger cities in their countries, Guayaquil, Ecuador, and San Diego, United States. One person came from the city of Chinandega, Nicaragua, and a Latina came from a small town in northern El Salvador called Santa Ana.

Summary. The Latinas were from a variety of 10 countries and multiple kinds of settings. Some of the Latinas came from rural and farms areas while others came from urban metropolitan cities.

Cuantos Anos?

The ages of the individuals when they first immigrated to the United States ranged from 3 to 50 years old. Thirteen respondents were under the age of 20, 9 were between the ages of 20 and 30, with only 2 women were 30 years old or older. When the respondents came to Des Moines, only 5 women were under the age of 20, 12 Latinas were between ages 20 and 30, 4 women were between 30 and 40, and 3 were 45 years old or older. At the time of the interview, only 1 was under the age of 25, 6 were between ages 25 and 30, 8 were between 30 and 40, and 9 were 40 or older.

Summary. Ages of the respondents varied at the time of the interview from 20s to 70s. However, the ages of the Latinas when they had first left their country were mostly young with all but two under the age of 30. The length of time the Latinas had been in Des Moines also varied from a couple of years to 30 or more.

But I'm Cute

How interviewees viewed their physical characteristics was simple to complex, positive to negative. Several respondents believed that their appearance and physical characteristics were Latina meaning having dark hair, skin, and eyes. However, that characterization also generated negative feelings, a few of the Latinas believed darker skin tone subjected Latinas to discrimination. Some of the Hispanics deemed that there was an advantage to having lighter skin and living in the Midwest. The interviewees ranged from "very Indian looking" with dark skin, hair, and eyes and short stature to "very European looking" with light skin, medium colored hair and eyes, and tall stature. For many of the respondents, their personal appearance was very important. A woman in her 50s explained, "Latinas do not show their age because they don't wrinkle like Anglo woman. Woman of color do not wrinkle and tend to look younger." Still another Latina stated,

> I know that some Hispanic woman do not like darker skin. I know they feel that way because I've heard comments that they say you are so white, when they have whiter skin than I do. Because most Hispanics do have dark complexions.

The Latinas discussed their children or grandchildren's looks as well. "My kids have kinda light eyes. The head is not blonde but it is not as black as mine. My daughter has very black hair. Nevertheless they don't have accents. So nobody know they are minorities." A second woman spoke about her son's marriage to an Anglo and what her grandchildren would look like. The woman said, "My daughter-in-law is American anyway. No matter. She is not brown, she's white. My grandson is gonna be blonde and blue eyed."

Several Latinas believed the way one looked was how one was treated. A Mexican offered, "I think everything is about appearance. The way they see you is the way they treat you. And I think that if they see that you are secure and sure of what you're saying, you're okay." Another Latina said, "I don't know if my appearance has anything to do with not having any problems or just my attitude." A young Mexican deemed that because she had dressed up she had been treated better by an inspector from whom she had been trying to get her drivers license for a full year. The young Mexican said, "You know we were kind of dressed up cause we had gone to church that day. The guy was so nice to us. You know a whole year of telling us no."

The respondents made various comments about how they looked in contrast to others in Des Moines. A Latina with very light skin wanted to be considered brown and to be known as a Latina not as an Anglo and said,

> I do identify with being brown, because it shocks people. But I'll remind them that I am brown. I am a quarter French. I look different but not really Spanish. You know I don't have the slanted eyes and the darker skin and the really thick straight hair.

Another Latina had looked up information on Des Moines on the Internet before moving here in order to find out what people were like in Des Moines and what they would look like. The respondent surmised this researcher helped to prepare her to understand what people would be like, "It is very important because it is my city now. Here are a lot of Germans. It is a different culture. It is European, not Latino."

A Mexican noted the fact that people look different than Latinos and made the comment about the eye color of people in Des Moines saying, "Eyes are prettier, more colorful. There almost everybody has brown eyes."

An additional Latina commented on how short she was by saying,

> I am so short. I would go to high school looking for my kids and a teacher would come out and tell me to get back into the classroom. If I was in the street playing ball with my kids, a neighbor would come out and try to kick us out and I would tell them I am the mother.

A woman talked about driving her car, a Jaguar, and she observed that people saw her as out of place and felt she was looked down upon saying,

> You know I rarely dress up. And I remember the first time I got my Jaguar. And this lady gave me a look. It was like what have you done to deserve that. It was an unpleasant look. People can look at you and smile and then people can look and punish you.

A Latina who was dressed up commented about how she felt she looked saying at the interview, "I am cute. I have nothing, but I am cute."

The Latinas came to the interview in different types of dress. Many were dressed very nicely in suits or dresses with high heels, fresh make up, and stockings. And a few Latinas wore casual clothes like sweat suits and tennis shoes and had uncombed hair. The two most popular colors of clothes worn were black and red.

Summary. The Latinas were conscious of how they looked and many respondents believed they looked different than Americans. A few of the interviewees discussed their own skin and hair color, but it was usually the Latinas with lighter skin who made comments about themselves. Most of the Latinas discussed that skin color was an issue over all for Latinos and that the darker you were the more likely you would have problems with Anglos. Several Latinas made reference that blonde hair and blue eyes were favorable traits to have. Some of the interviewees considered that how one looked and presented oneself affected how one was treated.

Latina, Hispanic, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Mexican, Guatemalan, What's in a Name?

The Latinas saw their identity in various ways. Some wanted to be referred to by their country, like Peruvian or Mexican. Other interviewees wished to be called Latina and found other terms offensive, while others were comfortable being called Hispanic. Some respondents used Latina and Hispanic interchangeably and a few wished not to have any reference other than by their name, personality type, or gender. The terminology used by the Latinas when referencing themselves and other Hispanics varied.

A Mexican said, "I guess I'm actually a Mexican-American." The Latina called other Spanish people Hispanics. An older woman said, "I am doing things now because I am a Spanish native." A Latina called other Latinas, "The Spanish people." A Mexican explained her feelings upon being called a Latina, "To be honest with you, I have never considered myself in any category. I've never been categorized as anything other than just friendly, outgoing, a nice person." One Latina gave away her lack of preference by saying, "You know I am more comfortable in the Hispanic, I mean American world." However, she continued, "I have more interaction with Latinos now." The Latina later said, "I am Guatemalan before I am Hispanic." A Central American said, "My only social connection to Latinos is a group of Latinos." Another interviewee wanted to be called Hispanic and claimed, "I am a very passionate person when it comes to being a Hispanic." Still a Mexican talking about other Latinos explained, "They just try to be with Mexicans." An Ecuadorian shared, "I am from Ecuador. I'm Indian." Yet a South American expressed, "I don't discriminate myself. I am an American." Yet when the Latinas were referring to music they often called it, "Spanish music."

Summary. The Latinas had preferences of how they wished to be referred to with no consensus from the group. Some respondents did not mind any title and yet one reference or another offended others. The safest way to allude to a respondent was to use their country of origin but if that was not known Latina seemed to be the most preferred. The study used Hispanic and Latina interchangeable.

My Expectations are High

The interviewees expressed different attitudes toward life. Respondents came across as empowered, able to do anything, while others were fearful and timid. Some women were energetic, strong, and excited while others were tired and weary. Many of the respondents had faced risks and challenges in coming to the United States, but most were not bitter or angry about these challenges to immigration A few were frustrated about life in Des Moines and others were content and happy. Many of the interviewees were motivated, wanting to do well and make a life in Des Moines. Others wanted to return to their former countries to live again in a more familiar culture. A few of the Latinas' comments reflected who they were and what they were about.

Here are some examples of statements made by the Latinas that gave a hint to what their attitudes toward living in Des Moines and life in general were: "I've adapted well. I am really thrilled to live in this country." "I want them to see me just for who I am." "In my family I am very outspoken. I really don't like to compromise my point of view a lot. I am very independent." "I think my expectations are higher." "I would like to be wiser in ways of dealing with people." "I think that's what made me social gave me a social conscience." "But I get nervous. I need to be perfect and have a perfect grade or I'm disappointed." "I am not the type of person that says OK, I made up my mind I don't want to know anything else. I like the challenge." "We give that message to other women: you are valuable . . . you are priceless. You need to keep your dignity and integrity intact. In order to give a sense of integrity and value to your own children." "I have grown as a human being. It has been a painful journey, very, very painful." "We are invisible in this town." "Every time I present before a non-immigrant audience or a non-Latino audience, I am so afraid." "I am a polite person. I am very smart but still I can't find my niche not yet." "I am very happy with the things I have." "I am friendly. I can make friends." "I am a social person. I have to go out and about." "Okay with the right attitude and the right tools, I will get there eventually. I will get there." "It is your attitude again. I mean I didn't come to this country with an attitude that everybody had to come to me and pamper me. I am going to make you notice by doing things." "Yes, because it would give you the rest of the skill that you need. It would be simply for your personality. To have a stronger personality in the future." "Yeah how do you breathe? You just say okay, this is what I have to do. I know that I come from a different country but we have all that. And I found that out. People think that we live in, I don't know. That just blows my mind. So it's fun to be able to teach all your life." "Oh, I don't feel any failure." "You know at this time we are very happy we are thankful." "I think that we would have survived and made it because with three children here and my husband, you bet I would have done something." "I've become very independent." "Because you are a success by yourself. It is good for your family. It is good for your community." "I have felt rejected." "She is crying because she has dark skin. I said, do you know how many girls want to have your tan? A lot of them. You cannot change your color. So don't worry about it." "I say okay let's make this really serious business. You really want to learn? I got the time and don't waste your time if you don't want to do it." "I am torn between feeling inadequate." "But also I feel that a society it is in our best interest to help everyone else." "But now even though I am a little late, I am connecting with them. And instead of connecting with them by becoming Anglo, I am making their half-Latino come out."

Summary. The interviewees were highly motivated as a group and self-reported to be very independent women. Many of the respondents interviewed exhibited an assertive attitude. They said they could do anything and had a very positive approach to life. The Latinas were also a very content group for the most part. There were a couple of women who regretted coming to the United States. Still, over all, the group of interviewees were very positive about life and their decision to move to the United States.

The Neighborhood, Not the Barrio

The Latinas did not live in one Des Moines neighborhood, rather, they lived throughout the area. The interviewees were spread over the city, living in integrated neighborhoods. However, when the respondents were asked if they suspected Hispanics were segregated from non-Latinos in Des Moines, most assumed they were and basically came from one or two neighborhoods. A Mexican stated, "Well the East Side, I think, for the most part. I think you see a lot of Latinas on the East Side of Des Moines. In West Des Moines, very few." A Central American concluded, "I'm not familiar with the South side. I think you have your Italian community there and you have your Hispanic communities."

In spite of their views of seeing Des Moines as segregated, 15 individuals lived in 10 different areas of the city of Des Moines; 6 Mexicans, 2 El Salvadorans, 2 Nicaraguans, 2 Hondurans, with 1 Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, and Cuban. Four Mexicans lived in the city of Urbandale. One Peruvian and 2 Mexicans lived in West Des Moines. One Argentinean lived in Johnston and 1 Mexican lived in Ankeny.

A Latina in her late 50s talked about having a place to belong and that she surmised the non-Latino community didn't want Latinos living in the Des Moines area and yet declared,

> You just know you have a place. There is a place for me, there is a place for us. Those of us who are here, we don't belong in Mexico and somehow we know that people

> don't think we belong here either. Well we're here. And you know we belong and we know it.

Home ownership was a topic that for Latinas was a big issue. Some of the Latinas said that owning their home was the most significant event to help them feel as if they had made it in Des Moines. Owning a home was a way to have roots in the community, to have a sense of belonging. A woman from Central America remarked, "It is important to us to have land, because that means you belong there." Some of the Latinas who did not own homes expressed the desire to do so someday. One Latina from Honduras dreamed of owning her own home revealing, "Because in my country they pay little money. I want a home, yeah. I can't buy nothing because there is little money. I wanna come here." A woman from Peru had a dream coming true, "We're building a house in West Des Moines." Another Central American exclaimed, "When we bought our house. That's when I felt at home."

Yet other interviewees continued to rent, and for some it was only until they could find a way to leave Des Moines. A Mexican revealed, "I would like to go back to Mexico. People here are putting up with living in old apartments."

Of the interviewees, 14 owned houses--7 Mexicans, 2 Nicaraguans, an El Salvadoran, a Peruvian, 1 Honduran, an Argentinean, and a Guatemalan. One Mexican owned a trailer home. Six respondents rented apartments--four Mexicans, an Ecuadorian, and one Cuban. One Mexican rented a trailer home. One Honduran rented a duplex. An El Salvadoran lived with her boyfriend and did not pay rent.

A young Mexican woman, who had had a hard time making Des Moines her home said, "I think this is starting to be home right now. I think I feel like I want to be home. I want to be in my apartment with my things, with my own phone saying they are calling me."

And another Latina from Central America shared her story of being home stating, "I was homeless with my children for about three months. I moved into a shelter and then to the Patch program. Then I got a job and a place of my own. I was very fortunate throughout the whole thing that I was bilingual and could speak English." The Latina had purchased a home for her and her children and said, "To own makes me feel like I made it."

A Latina inferred that when she bought her home the neighbors would feel their property values would go down stating,

> When I moved to my neighborhood I felt people will say, "there goes the neighborhood" but I am gonna show 'em. By six months after I moved there my house looked very nice it was all painted. I worked real hard on it. To own a home makes me feel I made it. Buying a home to me is like hey, I'm here.

Another Hispanic stated, "When we bought the house for us it was a big, big thing. For my husband it was huge." These two women spent a great deal of time fixing and making improvements on their houses, had plans to stay in Des Moines and a strong sense of pride in their homes.

Another Mexican woman who was undocumented when she arrived, talked about what they were able to rent when she moved to Des Moines with young children. The Latina exclaimed, " No bathroom inside. I mean, here in Des Moines with this kind of weather. But I thought even in my own country, I lived on a farm, but I had a bathroom." At the time of the interview, the woman owned a home with her husband.

Two other Latinas, one from Mexico who also came undocumented, found that it was very hard to find an apartment. The Mexican stated,

> We choose to live in West Des Moines. We came directly to West Des Moines because it wasn't easy to find housing in Des Moines at the time that we came, I came here in 1991. And it wasn't easy to find apartments so my ex-husband found an apartment in West Des Moines. The rent was higher. it was at the time almost $400 a month.

An El Salvadoran revealed, "We were looking for a house and when I called on the phone for an apartment they heard that I had an accent and they did not want to show me the apartment."

A woman from Ecuador talked about how poor some of the Latino immigrants coming to Des Moines were and how poor the apartments were that they could rent but said, "It's better to have here one piece of bread with four kids in one room than it is to live in Mexico."

A Latina who lives in a trailer she owns in Des Moines missed her home in Mexico saying,

> But in Mexico I miss my house. Here you pay rent and you know there are a lot of problems. The other trailer home that we lived it was in a very bad shape. I do remember the roof was falling apart. A family gave us some help they gave us a check and we have saved some and that was how we ended up buying this trailer home.

A young El Salvadoran who does not have the ability to rent her own apartment and lives with a boyfriend does not like the neighborhood she lives in and complained, "When you walk the streets they're selling stuff and they be like talking, I'll give you money, i.e., for sex. I hate it." This Latina did not like where she was living with her boyfriend because of the drug traffic or the fact she was taken as a prostitute on her street.

Summary. The Latinas lived in scattered neighborhoods throughout the Des Moines area. Many of the interviewees owned their own homes and several others were making plans to buy one. There was a strong pride of ownership in owning homes and it was a significant event for those who did. Some of the Latinas stated that they felt successful once they owned a home. Nevertheless there were other interviewees who stated that they had a hard time getting anyone to rent to them and the apartments available were often run down.

Coming to Gringo Land

Reasons that the Latina interviewees emigrated to the United States were many and diverse. Multiple circumstances came into play when making the decision to leave ones country. Reason, for immigrating to the United States stemmed from political unrest, economic hardship, opportunity, family, marriage, or the desire to learn English and United States' culture. Immigration decisions were not easily or quickly made and came with tension and emotion. Some of the interviewees had not intended to immigrate to the United States; they came to visit, not to make a home.

Often one family member had left the country of origin but would then seek family members to join them. An interviewee stated that only her father had left Mexico, but after coming to the United States, decided to bring the family. The Latina said simply "I think for one my dad had to come to make money to support us. And then I think he saw opportunities out here and decided, 'what the heck I might as well just bring everybody out here and see how it goes.'"

Another Mexican discussed how her husband had wanted to come to the United States and then have his family join him, but that it was not easy for the Latina to say yes. The family took several years to make the decision to immigrate and it was a harder decision for the Latina to make. One Latina stated,

> Yes, he was a successful person in Mexico, but we were not making enough money to support our family. My husband was working very hard and even though the two of us were working very hard, it took me 12 years to accept that no, we were not going to be able to raise our children the way we wanted to. And why? Well, many times we were unable to put food on the table even though we both were working. And not little work-- we were working full time, more than full time, extra time, weekends. I would have an outside job besides my full-time job. He would have side jobs besides his full-time job and still sometimes we wouldn't have food on the table.

A Cuban immigrant talked about political unrest and being forced to leave Cuba or go to prison. The words of the Latina were,

> Well, the situation was really bad, and we were working in the revolution against Castro, and we were working under the orders of the CIA and the American Embassy. We were all working with the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the people in Miami decided to go without telling us. We didn't know what happened, the day of the invasion. They put everybody in jail including the president's son.

Several of the interviewees came to the U.S. to study English. A Mexican stated, "I came because my father got married to an American and I wanted to study some English." Another Latina said, "The reason why I came to the United States was because my father and my mother wanted us children to speak the language. The English language." The Latina noted how valued an American education was in Mexico. A Honduran who did not want to come to the United States was pushed by her mother to come and learn English though she had other plans with her life allegorized,

> I was happy living in Honduras. I had finished high school and started a career in journalism, which my Father did not approve of. My aunt was working for an attorney who was helping an Ankeny couple adopt a child. My mom loved the States and had lived there in her youth off and on. I wanted to study in Monterrey or study journalism in Honduras, which was not a good thing to study at the time because of all the wars. Several people had disappeared and got killed and my father said no. So my mother decided I would go the United States with the family to learn English.

A woman from Peru who spoke French decided to learn English saying, "I came as an exchange student to learn English. My second language is French, but English is probably number one language spoken in the world." Another Hispanic mentioned, "I came to the United States because when I was 16 that summer, my Father sent me for a culture exchange to learn English." An El Salvadoran said, "I got lucky and won an AFS scholarship."

Yet for a Guatemalan it was the divorce of her parents and her mother' remarriage that landed her in the United States. The Latina stated,

> My parents got divorced when I was eight and my Mother remarried my Stepfather from Spain when I was in fifth grade. I was around ten. He was a professor, he got the opportunity to come to the United States and be a Fulbright Scholar for his Masters and Ph.D. at the University of Kansas, and that's how I ended up in Lawrence, Kansas.

An Argentinean moved to Minnesota because her husband won a scholarship to the University of Minnesota.

For others, it was boyfriends and husbands who brought them to the United States. A Nicaraguan said,

> I came to the United States because I had a boyfriend from Des Moines, Iowa. I came to Des Moines to meet his family. I was here for about three months and I then went back home, I was engaged, and we got married two years to the date we met. I've been in Des Moines ever since.

A Mexican woman had a similar story about meeting her husband and coming to the United States saying,

> I met my husband when I was 15. And he came to the United States two years later. And I did not hear anything for 10 years. And then one time he calls me, I was divorced with a son. He was already divorced twice with two kids. He asked me to marry him. I told him he was crazy and said, I don't know you I have not heard from you. But he say, 'Why don't you come over and spend some time and we will see what happens.' And that's what I did. I came for two weeks. I went back to Mexico and decided to marry him. I came back in '95 for a vacation and stayed.

A Mexican had a boyfriend who convinced her that they should go to the United States, get married, and started a life in the States. She described her situation as the following,

> I came here in 1969. My boyfriend was working in the United States across the border from McAllen, Texas, and he served a lot of customers in the States. He already had a Social Security Number, so at that time I don't know anything and he said, 'I will marry you.' And I got legal. My first son was born in San Benito, Texas. After this he wanted to move to Dallas, Texas. My parents did not like it. I had never moved so far from them.

A Mexican came to the United States because of her husband, but under much different circumstance than other interviewees, explaining, "I came when my husband had an accident. I came here because the doctor who was taking care of my husband asked for permission for me to come over."

Still other respondents spoke of seeking a better future. A Latina who came alone to the United States sought a better life for her and her son saying,

> I work hard four years. But I want more, not just work for money. I want more. I want a home. I want to give my son a Dad. Have a home. A family, and I decide to come here, not to find a man but have a better life, because in my country they pay little money.

Negative feelings with families were the reasons a couple of Latinas moved to the United States. A Mexican explained, "My family was not happy about my marriage to my husband and I wanted to be far away from them. My parents died. I grew up with my brothers and sisters." A young El Salvadoran left her country because her aunt did not want her explaining, "I couldn't stay with my aunt because she didn't like me, so that's why I decided to come here."

It was different for a Latina to be disconnected to family and in fact move because of them.

Summary. The reasons to immigrate to the United States are multi-facetted. Some interviewees came with husbands, or for husbands, while other interviewees came to study English and others to go to college. A few of the respondents found their way to the United States to escape poverty and make a better life. A couple of the interviewees were political refugees escaping war and communism.

How and Why Did They Come to Des Moines?

Many of the Latinas, but not all, were already in the United States and then moved to Des Moines because circumstances changed, such as better opportunities for work or a better life style. For other respondents it was because a Latino spouse wanted to or already lived in Des Moines and brought the Latina.

Anglo husbands also brought a couple of Latinas to Des Moines. A Latina with a husband from Iowa said, "I met my husband in Long Beach, California, and he was from Johnston, Iowa. He wanted to come back to Ames, Iowa, and finish at Iowa State and we have been here ever since." Ankeny was the hometown of another husband and the Latina said, "My husband was originally from Ankeny. We owned a business in Texas and that did not do well. He sought out better opportunity here in Des Moines." A Honduran offered, "After graduation, my husband came back to Des Moines to work in the family business." A husband of a Mexican, who was from Des Moines but working in Guadalajara, stated, "He got a job up here in Des Moines. We dated for three years and I would come here and stay with his family. We got married and are here."

A Cuban's husband found a teaching job in Des Moines, but the Latina related,

> I was not happy because I really liked Mason City, Iowa, but my husband decided to move to Des Moines. He came first and then I came two years later because of the kids and other things. When my son graduated from high school I moved to Des Moines.

Latino husbands brought the interviewees to Des Moines because of economic hardship in their country of origin. The husbands came to Des Moines for jobs, usually manual labor. There was often a family history of males leaving and coming to the United States for jobs with the family and wives staying behind. Sometimes the whole family moved to the States intending to move back eventually. Often, there was a family member of the husband already in the U.S., usually a brother. A Latina came because,

> He told me Iowa, so I said, "What was that?" He say, "a state, in the north or whatever. Pretty close to Chicago." He tried to explain to me. He said, "I have a second cousin from there and I think there is work." I asked him if it was cold.

A Mexican offered, "My husband was here working when I came. He was here six months. He came here because there wasn't work in Mexico and his brother was here and he helped him come with money."

Some individuals were already living in larger cities in the United States, but they or their spouses did not like the pace, crime, or competition with other Latinos for jobs. The pay for Latinos was said to be better in Des Moines than other cities as well. A Mexican explained, "We like Des Moines very much. It is very quiet. Quieter than Chicago, and also more opportunities to work." One Latina also talked about states like California that had become less friendly towards Latinas. The Latina stated,

> A lot of people do come here because of the cost of living, quality of life, and less crime. Lately, I think if I lived in California, I would have moved here because I hate Proposition 187, which was that law that passed there.

One family had cities other than Des Moines to choose from because of the husband's previous work, but the size of Des Moines and the fact that family was already here helped them to decide on Des Moines. The Latina confirmed,

> Des Moines was chosen because we had the opportunity to go to either Los Angeles, for example, or to go to a big city like Chicago where there are more Hispanics and you could have, you know, more access to bilingual places, for example. But I knew about the big cities in the United States from readings I have done. I've read the newspapers and watched the news and everything I said, "There's no way I'm going to take my children to a big city in the United States. I don't want my children to be exposed to drugs, violence, gangs, and all these things so I say, Let's go to a small city, a small place." And my ex-husband had lived here for two or three years. He had a brother here too so we decided Des Moines was the best place to grow our family.

Other Latinas' husbands came to Des Moines by an entirely different route. For example, one husband went to graduate school in Ames, Iowa. The woman offered, "He applied to get his Masters in Ames, Iowa, at Iowa State University, graduated, got a job, and then we moved to Des Moines. That is how I ended up in Des Moines, Iowa." A Des Moines company hired another Latina's husband. The Latina explained, "The company was recruiting in Argentina to work for them and he was hired to run a program and then transferred to headquarters in Des Moines."

However, a Central American and her family moved from Miami to Des Moines because a well-to-do couple hired them and brought them here to work. The Latina related, "This lady tell my boss, they ask day before if I will work for them in Des Moines, Iowa. I say, 'What?' That was a surprise for me. I say, 'Lord, I never seen you answer me so fast.'" The Latina felt the move was good and explained,

> I think here was more slow. That was a difference when we come here. We have more time. In Miami, we feel .... you don't know how I feel. I see the difference. I think the reason why is the big city. And the education for my children. Life is better here and not too dangerous. Miami now is very bad.

Another reason Latinas who were alone found themselves in Des Moines was because of other family members or friends who were already here. One Latina, who had a son in Des Moines, stated, "I came because he asked me to come. He's my only son. Remember that. And I can't survive without him." And another Latina said, "My friend had a brother here in Des Moines."

School was another reason that brought individuals to Des Moines. A Central American said, "I started going to nursing school at the College of Osteopathic Medicine Surgery." The Latina later met a man from Des Moines and got married. A Mexican came first to study English in high school and returned to attend college. Another Latina said, "I realized that I liked the school and they had everything so I started my paperwork and got in."

A Latina accompanied her mother to Des Moines. The mother wanted to get back together with her husband, though they were divorced. However, the father had married a woman from Johnston, Iowa. The Latina decided to stay near her father in Des Moines. The woman said, "So I came here. My dad was here, and maybe I can stay for good because I am a student."

Latinas came to Des Moines for many different reasons. A Hispanic, while living in California, was hired by the state to work in Des Moines. The respondent recalled, "It was really something because after the Governor called to offer me a job, that I had accepted, we hung up and I thought I couldn't go to Iowa. What am I doing?"

Yet one young Latina was hitchhiking to West Virginia from California and on the way decided to stop in Omaha, Nebraska, which in turn brought her to Des Moines explained,

> I got tired of it and then this guy gave us a ride to Omaha. In Omaha was a lady who helps people with no papers and she can get a job. So I decided to stay in Omaha with this family and then the niece living with them offered me a baby-sitting job in Des Moines.

Summary. The Latinas for the most part found themselves in Des Moines because of family, school, marriage, acquiring English, and jobs. The respondents who came here for jobs did so because there was less competition from other Latinos, more jobs, and higher pay. The Latinas who came to Des Moines to learn English picked the Midwest because so few people spoke Spanish and they would be forced to learn English.

Going, Coming, Going, Staying

The length of time the interviewees had been living in Des Moines varied from 1 year to over 31. Some of the interviewees stayed continuously and others interrupted their time in Des Moines by going back to their former countries. Latinas would go back to visit their former countries staying for a week or two, often to be with family, attend a funeral, see someone ill, or to expose their children to their native culture. Other respondents would go back to their native countries for an extended period of time, often staying for several years. There were many reasons the Latinas moved back and forth between countries. They may have come the first time as exchange students while in high school and then wanted to return for college. One interviewee who met a United States citizen on a visit, returned home to her country, but later decided to come to the United States, get married, and live. The Latinas may have gone back to their native country because their parents went back and forth when they were children and they finally chose the United States to live permanently. A Mexican offered,

> The first time I came I was in fifth grade and then I went back to Mexico with my parents for two years. Then I came back for my ninth grade year, and I stayed. My parents were in Mexico City and I stayed with my grandparents.

Some Latinas living in the United States had children here but wanted to go back and raise their children in their native country. A Honduran explained, "I went back to Honduras to live and my daughter was born. Then I choose to go back to the United States for school and get a job. I came back to Des Moines."

An El Salvadoran had come to live in the United States as an exchange student but went back to her country. Then because of war, she deemed she had to leave. She came back to Des Moines because of the host family she had had in high school.

Some of the Latinas have never gone back to their home country because of the following: a lack of interest, no family to go back to, no money for the trip back, were in the process of emigrating, were undocumented or did not want the risk of crossing the border. A Cuban reflected, "I will never go back. I would go to jail and now there is no one left." A Mexican added, "I could not go back. I do not have the documents."

A few of the interviewees talked about how difficult it was to visit their former country. A Mexican said,

> I would like to go back but it is hard. I told my cousin, "You were going to live different here and it was going to be hard for you to go back." Now she goes here and spends money there, things like that are really hard sometimes to do in Mexico. I said, " the longer you stay here the harder it is going to be for you to go back to Mexico."

Some of the Latinas interviewed still believed they would move back to their home country. One of the Latinas had a second home and was making retirement plans to leave the United States for her country of origin. "We have a family home near family in Mexico. I want to move back."

Nevertheless, many of the Latinas have made the decision to stay in Des Moines. A Latina said, "I'm tired, I have been here 22 years, I will stay."

Another Latina was so frustrated with living in the United States that she had plans to leave, "I am going back this year. I had plans to go sooner but had problems with my pregnancy. Now everything is fine but I had the tickets and everything to go back. My plans got ruined." As yet, one Mexican was undecided and said, "If I don't marry my boyfriend, I will go back."

Other interviewees stayed in the United States for diverse reasons such as it was too late for them because their children had grown up in the States and would not follow them back. A Mexican cried, "I want to go back but my children are here." Or, one Latina had married an Anglo and made the United States her home, she loved living in the United States. Still others knew that the United States was stable and dependable and their former country was not. A Mexican explained, "For me now it is wonderful living here." A Latina added, "(the U. S. has) The best schools." A Hispanic stated, "We wanted to make a difference for our kids (in the United States)." A Central American commented, "(We like) The warmth of the people of Iowa." A Mexican said, "You know at this time we are very happy. We are thankful because in this country you can see that we are working, we are making money to eat." A South American included, "Everything works even if Anglos complain. It is stable; it is a democracy."

Summary. Some of the interviewees go back and forth from the United States to their native country staying at each, sometimes for years at a time. Reasons for going back and forth between countries were different for different people. Sometimes the Latinas went back to their former countries to be with family and friends; other times it was to be sure their children grew up with the culture of their former country. A few of the respondents wanted to make sure their children grew up with Spanish as their primary language. A couple of Latinas had never returned to their former countries because they could not go back or because there was no one left to visit. A few of the Latinas were still planning to move back to their former countries while others had decided to make Des Moines their home.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS: YOU'RE IN THE UNITED STATES. SPEAK ENGLISH

The Latinas had the desire to learn English but wanted to be able to freely speak Spanish, a language they considered to be an integral part of who they were.

English the Key to a Locked Door

The respondents' expressed the desire to learn English and considered it was important for all Latinas. For Latinos, knowing how to speak English was finding a key to a locked door. The English language opened up opportunities for Hispanics in the United States. The Latinas believed they gained respect, were better able to find job possibilities, and interact with the non-Latino community; therefore speaking English was a primary concern for Latinos. In fact, some of the Latinas had originally come to the United States to become proficient in English.

While learning English was deemed extremely important, speaking Spanish was at the very core of who they were. The interviewees felt that as a Hispanic one must never forget her primary language. The Latinas wanted to feel that they could speak Spanish without repercussions from the rest of the non-Latino community.

Every Latina interviewed spoke Spanish as her primary language but, again, the number one issue for making a better quality of life in Des Moines was to learn English. A Mexican who could not speak English said,

> I think mainly what they should do is study English. Then you can get a better job and have a better future. That's the most important thing you can do. People see you differently. They have a better opinion of you. You can take care of yourself better and you command respect.

One woman said, "You are no one if you cannot speak the language." A Central American also stated, "For my pride I want to speak English." Over half of the interviewees spoke Spanish as their primary language at home. A Latina made the observation, "In general, bilingual people have a better understanding of other people."

Several Latinas who had come to the United States primarily to learn English had no intention of staying. A young woman from Peru stated, "I came as an exchange student to learn English when I was 18." Being able to speak English was seen as a way to have a better future in their country of origin. A Honduran sent by her mother observed, "My Mother thought that if I learned English and I came to this country and learned how to speak proficiently that I would have a better future in my country."

However, a few Latinas who were in the United States had no desire to learn English, believing they would be going back to their country to live. A Latina spoke about not knowing English,

> We always speak Spanish at home. I stayed home to raise the children and I spoke to them in Spanish. I took classes but I did not think we would live here. I feel bad now that I don't speak English and I know I need it.

Another interviewee commented about coming to the United States and that because she had no intention of staying, did not care that she was undocumented or did not know English. The Latina stated, "I worry about nothing. Learning English, nothing. I am going back to my country. I don't care what happens here." Interestingly, this Latina did end up making Des Moines her home and has taken great pains to learn English.

Many of the Latinas did not know any English when they came to the United States. A woman from Cuba related, "I did not know the language when I arrived." Two Latinas who had lived in California or Miami discussed that in these two areas one did not have to learn to speak English and could get by with Spanish because of the number of Latinos in these two geographic areas. One Latina stated, "I have two brothers in California but I did not think going to California was going to help my English." Another young Latina chose to move to the Midwest because she felt she would be forced to speak English here. The Latina remembered, "I said the Midwest anywhere. Probably where there won't be a lot of Hispanics 'cause I wanted to learn English. So they sent me to East Dubuque."

A Mexican woman who came from California talked about feeling as though she had two primary languages saying, "I speak both English and Spanish because my friends speak English and Spanish at home. It's funny. I am the youngest but the one who speaks English the best."

Learning English was a significant achievement for the Latinas. A Mexican declared what it felt like to learn English, "It was a sense of accomplishment; it felt really nice." A couple of women talked about how good they would feel when they could speak English. One woman said, "So for my pride I say I want to speak English very well." Another stated, "People see you differently; they have a better opinion of you. You can take care of yourself better and you command a little respect."

Several interviewees learned English before they had come to the United States having gone to private schools in their country of origin where English was taught at a very early age. An individual from Nicaragua had English classes from first to sixth grade and then from seventh grade on, all of her schooling was in English. When the Latina took a foreign language, she took French because she was already proficient at the English and Spanish languages. Unfortunately, living in Des Moines had not accorded the respondent the opportunity to use her French and she reflected, "By the time I graduated from high school I was trilingual but you know living in the States my French has gone out the window." Several of the interviewees spoke more than two languages. A Latina who went to England to learn English stated, "I went to learn English, but I went around with other foreign students who spoke Italian and Portuguese. It was a big vacation."

A Honduran stated, "I went to a totally bilingual private school growing up and then majored in Spanish literature at the University of Kansas." Others studied English at school but never had the opportunity to practice. A Mexican college student said, "I could not speak it really good at all. I never practiced until I came here, but I knew the grammar and how you put words together."

A Central American talked about learning proper English in her country saying, "We had all nuns and, of course, there was no slang. It was all proper words. Up to this point if anybody say 'ain't' it rubs me wrong." Another talked about how she could not swear in Spanish saying, "If I am upset here I can go, 'Oh shit.' I will never dream to say any of those words in Spanish. Somehow they don't have the same impact. It just sounds filthy coming out of my mouth." Another bilingual Latina said, "I do my numbers in Spanish. If I am in a meeting I will do them in English, but if I am at home doing the check book, it is in Spanish."

The issue of English being the official language of Iowa came up at different times and with mixed reactions. A few individuals surmised that if you were living in the United States you should be speaking English. A Latina stated, "You're here, you learn English. You abide by the laws of this country." Another respondent commented, "If you went to live in Mexico you wouldn't get any special assistance. Why should you here? It is fine if you want to speak Spanish with your friends." Another Latina commented about the English only legislation saying, " You should not have to give up your Spanish, but you must learn English." One individual used her parents as an example, "They used to speak English more but they know they have all of us that live here to interpret and guide them. They don't use it anymore but that's our problem. It's not the United States; it is my family."

Yet there were other Latinas who believed passing a bill that required all official documents to be printed only in English was a mistake. A respondent who took exception to the English only said, "And I no agree when they wanna put the English official language here, here in Des Moines. If you insist, start for changing Des Moines. Because I learn Des Moines is French and Iowa is Indian."

A Latina disagreed with accommodating Latinos with language and used as an example California schools taught in Spanish saying,

> They want to be part of the United States but they want to have a school in Spanish. I think if they want the children to continue with the Spanish, teach it at home. And then go to school to learn English and be like everybody else. Because if you want to start segregating, it is like having the black wanting a black college. Excuse me. You been fighting to be in front of the bus and now you want to go backwards. Can't do that.

Latinas talked about the advertisements in the paper and on TV that were against Hispanic immigration and the use of Spanish. One Latina had this to say,

> I've had people upset about you know the immigration ads and upset about language. I'm thinking first of all, the native language was one of those who were here before colonial times. So my boss one day said, 'Well I just think people should speak the language of this land.' And I'm like, oh so you speak Sioux and Cherokee buddy?'

Other Latinas followed in the same vein, bringing up the fact Spanish explorers were here before the English and that this country could very well have been a Spanish-speaking country. Another Latina also brought up anti-immigration in the media by stating,

> Those people saying in one of their advertisements, "The immigrant no speak our language and no understand our culture." And you say "What culture?" The real

> culture is the Indians. And the real, you know, language is Indian. Because that country when I have my citizenship I studied about this country. And the first in the United States was colonies from Spain and from French all over the world. So the people were ignorant people because this country strong. I won't leave because maybe your great, great grandpa came from someplace.

Two women who moved to the United States as children remembered either being helped or harassed by other school children when they learned English. One of the interviewees talked about losing her accent in junior high saying, "To be honest with you, kids in Junior High can be pretty cruel and I think that's why I worked on my accent so hard." A Mexican Latina remembered,

> There were a few girls that wanted to take me under their wing and some did not 'cause they did not understand me. I will never forget when I went to my 10-year reunion. Some of those people remembered me from my first day. It's just neat to see myself being a totally different person and being able to communicate in a different manner.

The Latinas who spoke English cited times when it made a difference for them in the United States. An El Salvadoran told the story of how speaking English, in fact, helped her chance of getting into the United States. The Central American explained,

> We went in and the consul started speaking to me in Spanish but he had kind of a broken Spanish. So I started talking to him in English and he said, "Oh you speak English." And I said, "Yeah I was an exchange student in Des Moines." "Oh that was where you are going?" I said, " yeah." He said, "Well I am from Iowa." So I was able to tell him (about) my American family who invited us to go and visit them. So all I can say I was really lucky.

Other Latinas discussed grandparents and parents who had not learned English and that they had not ever integrated into mainstream society in the States. An interviewee commented, "Make sure you learn the language. That is something my grandparents never did and I would not recommend it for any newcomer."

Some parents of the Latinas had had a limited ability to speak English and were learning. A respondent spoke of how she spoke Spanish with her mother at home but tried to speak English with her in public. "With my mom I speak Spanish all the time and she wants me to speak English with her but it is hard. I will speak English when we are with non-Spanish speakers." A Mexican American shared, "None of my grandparents ever learned English though they were born in the United States." The Hispanic went on to clarify,

> My great, great grandmother was born in the United States and there were others before her. So how many generations back did we go? We are not Mexicans, but we are not Americans. When did we quit? I was never a Mexican. But we are. My great grandmother, Mama Chela, never learned fluent English. She could sign her name on checks . . . she did learn to do that.

Children and language issues were complicated. Some of the Latina's children only spoke Spanish at home or not at all, though they knew how. A woman from Mexico complained,

> My daughter will not speak Spanish with me. The rascal will avoid it. Ever since she was little she said, "You speak English right Mom?" And then she would spend summers in Mexico and pick it up, but she won't allow herself to speak it at home.

Meanwhile some of the Latina's children translated for them when they interacted with non-Spanish speaking individuals. A daughter acted as the translator for her Mother's interview. Another Latina explained, "A lot of Hispanics don't want to learn English. Don't even try. Just take the kids with them and have them translate."

Some children of the interviewees taught themselves English so they would fit into a new country. A Mexican mother illustrated,

> I had a talk with my kid. I said, "You know what? We're in a country that we don't know nothing about. We don't speak the language, we don't understand nothing. We don't know nobody. You and I are here on our own. So whatever we do from here on it's going to be because we want it." And he did. He just picked up English right away and he did really good.

Most of the Latinas expressed the desire for their children to speak English. There were Latinas also who did not speak Spanish to their children, though they were the exception. A Latina offered her regret for not teaching her children Spanish saying,

> It is so how hard for my daughter not to be able to speak Spanish with Spanish-speaking parents and she is embarrassed by it. We could have had bilingual children. Both my husband and I are Hispanic. We wanted them to have a command of the English language. I didn't know what I know now.

Another Latina explained, "I hardly spoke Spanish with the kids. My ex-husband forbid it. I feel ashamed because they are angry with me, my daughter especially." A Peruvian also offered an explanation for why parents did not speak Spanish with their children.

> Their parents want them to speak English and not Spanish because they went through so much when they just got here. And they were probably teased and called names. They did not want their children to go through that so they said only English at home. So only English and no Spanish.

Dos Lenguas

Still a great number of the respondents very much wanted their children to speak Spanish. One Mexican worried about her children's Spanish speaking abilities stating,

> My children do great. Now English is their first language. Now they forgot about Spanish. They don't speak as fluently as they used to. It's hard for me it hurts. I mean it worries me, because when they go back to visit Mexico, they have a hard time at the beginning and all the families make fun of them.

Another Mexican wanted her children to speak Spanish so much that she did not learn English. "When the children were little, I wanted them to speak Spanish so I did not learn English." An El Salvadoran explained it was her husband who wanted the children bilingual. "My children speak Spanish. And it's more my husband's efforts than mine, I have to admit that. He's the one that pushed for speaking Spanish at home." A few of the interviewees were making their children learn Spanish at school to read, write, and understand the proper grammar. A respondent stated, "They are taking Spanish in high school so they will learn the grammar and the reading and all the things so they can be fully bilingual. I have basically forced them, begged them to do that." These Latinas were adamant that their children be proficient in both languages. One family moved back and forth to Mexico so the children would not forget Spanish, "We worked here for a year and so the children would not forget Spanish, moved back to Mexico."

In other families, one parent spoke English and the other Spanish to the children. A woman from Mexico explained, "I talk to my children in Spanish but it is hard as my husband speaks to them in English." One interviewee was taught English by her children. The Latina states

> *Mi Hijos*, they were very good teachers. And when I did not understand something they told me and found a way to explain it to me. *Si* Mama. This word is when you do this and when you wanna do this.

There were quite a few families who spoke both languages fluently. A Hispanic declared, "My husband said that our son speaks better English than he does."

Language and the way Des Moines' schools approached them were referenced by a few of the interviewees. A Latina whose children spoke both English and Spanish wanted her children to learn a third language and was frustrated that Des Moines did not offer languages, "You know in Des Moines language is not taught until you're in junior high or high school, except for some grade schools, but not all." One woman expressed her dream about Iowa schools and language saying,

> I think language, development of language like what we are talking about for children from the time they are little, imagine in the heartland that Iowa can be a model community for the rest of the country and that Iowa would be a bilingual state.

One Mexican talked about the fact that when she came to Des Moines, her children only spoke Spanish but their cousins could only speak English, and the two families could not communicate, "Even though they were cousins they were not able to communicate. But you know children are wonderful. They played soccer and one started learning Spanish and the others English and they got along well."

Husbands and boyfriends were also factors for some of the Latinas with respect to language they use. One husband learned a few words of Spanish when he was courting the Latina but later made fun of her accent and this created a sore spot in their marriage. The Central American explained,

> He learned Spanish and his last few letters were in Spanish when I was still living in Nicaragua. Now I am torn between feeling inadequate. I realize he won't have any patience with my English. It's a slap in my face every time I am trying to talk.

Another Latina whose husband speaks Spanish, said that he could not help her with English but wanted her to learn. She stated,

> My husband does not speak English very well. But he told me I don't have the patience to teach you. Whatever you do, you will have to do it on your own. Now I speak better English than he does.

And yet another husband became jealous when his wife started to learn English. "I was learning English and going to Toastmasters, improving my communication skills. But my husband who was always jealous became more jealous. And he would give me a hard time." A Hispanic husband who knew English hid issues by using English so his Spanish-speaking wife would not know. The Latina related

> Unfortunately, I did not know English and my husband knew I did not. So he received a letter from immigration lawyer here in town saying that it was going to take anywhere from four to five year for me to get my documents.

A South American decided she had to learn English or leave her husband. The Hispanic explicated, "His career depended on his English and I would be living in the United States. I decided that either stay in the apartment crying and leave my husband or learn English." And yet a boyfriend was taking Spanish to better relate to a Latina. This Latina stated, "He is so nice. He likes Latin culture and is taking Spanish."

Latinas also found the ability to speak two languages was a help in Des Moines. Two women talked about their ability to use bilingual skills and how valuable they were. A Hispanic stated, "Being a Latino in Des Moines means that there'll be more opportunities for me to contribute to the company by using my different bilingual skills." Several interviewees were working for Des Moines companies who had Latin American offices and Spanish was useful for employment. A respondent exclaimed, "There's so many jobs out there and my bilingual skills are very needed in many different areas. So to me it is tremendous that I am bilingual. It has opened a lot of doors." Nevertheless, a Guatemalan commented that real bilingual skills were lacking in Des Moines and just because you spoke two languages did not make you bilingual; you must speak, read, and write proficiently in both languages. The Latina stated,

> You know, I mean we've had people hired for translator positions or bilingual positions that oh my god you know they were not proficient for the job. Just because you speak doesn't mean you are proficient. Just because you speak does not make you bilingual. They don't understand there are different levels and they don't understand the importance of professionalism.

However, some Latinas had an internal conflict about speaking fluent English, a feeling of betrayal to their culture. A respondent explained, "I wanted and needed to fit in and to learn English so bad that now (I don't know) who am I. Am I brown?" A Latina deemed, "Seventy-five percent of her Latino culture was the Spanish language. You have a need to speak Spanish if you are a Latino." One Latina declared, "Speaking Spanish helps with homesickness." Also, a few interviewees believed Latinos should never stop speaking Spanish. One Latina who did not know any English talked about a time when someone in Des Moines finally spoke to her in Spanish. "The lady say, 'You speak *habla Espanol*?' I was feeling so good when she talked to me in my language. Wonderful!"

Several respondents shared what a burden it was to not know English. An interviewee mentioned, "I remember I was so afraid of taking the phone and talking English." Another felt terrible that she had to depend on others and wanted to learn English saying, "It felt bad, since you don't speak the language and you just can't do anything."

The Latinas talked about how hard it was to learn English and that one must hear, think, speak, and force oneself to use it. A Mexican explained how exhausting it was. "So you're thinking in Spanish and you're thinking in English too. You are trying to decode all that information and record it again to communicate with somebody else. It is exhausting!" A Central American worried about being offensive by saying something incorrectly or by being misunderstood. "I might be offensive without the intention or give the wrong impression or create some misunderstanding."

Several Latinas taught themselves English, learning word by word by getting a dictionary out and looking up words saying, "I used a bilingual dictionary, an English dictionary, a Spanish dictionary, and an encyclopedic dictionary to understand the words." One Latina offered, "You must speak English every day and it will get better and better." An Argentinean told how she had won a scholarship to learn English and after eight months, she was speaking English. A couple of women had host families in Des Moines who were real assets when they were learning English. A woman from Central America exclaimed, "My host father, who was a teacher, just threw me out there. He said, 'If I had not done that, you would have found someone who spoke Spanish and never learned.'" A younger Latina learned English by being with Anglos, she states,

> Well I hang out with a lot of American people. The people in Omaha helped me out a lot because they didn't know Spanish and I had to speak with them and the lady she likes to talk a lot. And I couldn't understand her and she keeps on talking and talking so then she gave me a book to read and then I tried to listen to music in English and that's how I started.

One Latina was very frustrated with her friend and neighbor who had been here for five years and was not trying to learn English. The Latina explained,

> She still ask me to make phone calls for her. She listens to Mexican music on the Spanish channel. They buy a satellite cause they wanna watch Spanish TV. Anglos don't have to please us because we are Mexicans and they don't have to learn Spanish.

Television was used as a resource by the respondents to learn English. Watching English language programs on TV was how a few Latinas improved their English-speaking skills. A Nicaraguan watched programs in both languages to help with both English, and Spanish saying, "You know lately I have been watching TV in Spanish because I'm going from English and when I'm using English and Spanish all the time I get confused."

The Latinas discussed the difficulty of finding jobs for individuals who could not speak English. One interviewee spoke of her cousin,

> Like my cousin when he moved here, they don't speak English so to find a place that was willing to hire him. We just went from place to place and he found a job he did by his surprise. He was so pleased he did not have to learn the language.

A Mexican's father who was a surgeon talked about the fact that eventually he went back to Mexico. The Latina talked about her father and said, "He was not happy here. He cannot find a job here, he cannot practice because he does not know English at all. He cannot pass the board. And that's his life." A Latina who spoke no English sighed,

> It may be sad at times we do not know the language and we don't have enough possibilities for work because you need the language for everything and we do not have the language. There is no time. Sometimes I feel real bad because of the communication. There was people who are walking by and say "Hi" and there are other people that look at you like with anger and really bad.

A Mexican surmised, that in order to have respect, you must speak English, explaining, "Study English. Then you can get a better job and have a future here. People see you differently. They have a better opinion of you. You can take care of yourself better and you command a little respect."

Still another Latina found a job because of her skills, but spoke no English. The woman had her children make flash cards for the words that she would need at work. One of the cards she had written in English with Spanish on the back was, "Hello my name is. May I help you? My English is not good but my work is. Please trust me."

Latinas talked about situations where other Latinos would not speak Spanish to them. A Mexican explained, "There was this young man and we asked him if he was willing to interpret and he said he did not know Spanish but we knew that he could speak but he just did not want to." A Mexican woman knocked on the door of a neighbor who is Hispanic but was told, "I don't speak Spanish," and asked, "Why are you here?"

Slang in either language came up as an issue because you could know the language but could still be left out of a conversation. You missed the point of the conversation because you did not understand the meaning of the slang. A Mexican woman stated, "Like we gave slang but I was a teenager when I came here and it had changed so I don't know. I have a different vocabulary from college. And here I don't understand the joke." A Peruvian added,

> I met some people from Mexico. If they think you're not understanding or following they tend to not talk to you. I met some at a party and Americans were telling a joke and laughing but they don't get the inside joke. So they try not to be with Americans.

Latinas had various ways to help with the language issue and in fact, several were helping others learn English. A Latina brought up the idea of having people teach on a one-to-one basis explaining, "Like a pal if you only speak Spanish and I don't speak English one way or another we have to communicate. You teach me English, and I will teach you Spanish." A few wanted to see the news in Spanish on the local programs as well as have a section of the paper for local Spanish news. A Latina said, "It would be neat to have some newspapers print local news in Spanish. Things happen to people here with the Spanish and they say it all in English. They don't know what happened." Another Latina brought up the idea of a gathering place for Latinas where "They could speak Spanish. You could play English videos or watch Spanish TV. A place that is relaxing and felt comfortable."

English classes were offered to Hispanics wanting to learn English but it was difficult for those who needed the classes to get to them. Making time to go to a class to learn English was brought up over and over. A Mexican elucidated, "I think we offer English classes but not enough. Not at the right time, not in the right locations. Learning a language is hard here." One Latina explained,

> There are classes I think at DMACC. They can just go. I know it's hard cause they probably been working the whole day and they have to go at night and take it. But I wonder if weekends they can take a couple of hours and try that. It's hard they have long hours.

A Mexican offered,

> Maybe companies that hire Latinos should be more flexible to let them have time to learn English, and bring these people to an area of work and say we are going to have English classes for the people who are interested. This is going to be part of your job.

A couple of women suggested that employers offer English training on the job. Two Latinas brought up the fact that in Canada a six-month period of support and training is offered to non-English speaking people in order to teach them English. One Latina stated, "In

Canada, if you don't speak English you go over there and they support you for six months. And you can go to school every Monday and Friday." Another Latina's church, Open Bible, was offering free English training assistance.

Having a Spanish accent was an issue for many of the Latina interviewees. The comments went in different directions when asked about accents: whether or not they considered if people looked down on them because of it or if they were proud because they had an accent. A Latina remembered, "They would say, 'Oh you say that so cute.' I'm like I don't want to be cute." One Hispanic said, "Because sometimes I do feel that just because someone is not expressing themselves correctly is because they lack the language that doesn't mean they lack intelligence or like if they don't know what they are talking about." An Ecuadorian stated,

> What about if I tell you I don't speak English? Do you think I am stupid because I don't speak English? In other countries we also have colleges. We have schools. We know how to talk, how to achieve, how to respect all those things.

One young Latina explained, "Telemarketers hang up when they hear my accent. They go, 'Oh never mind.'" A Cuban recalled the woman who said, "I don't want to talk to the lady with the accent." The Latina added, "Many people do not like to deal with an accent. They have to pay more attention." A Nicaraguan talked about why Anglos did not want to talk to someone with an accent and said it took more time and patience. The person had to work harder to listen and they did not want to be bothered or to have to work at listening. One woman said, "If you have an accent, people cannot hear you." She related a time when she was out to dinner and a gentleman stopped to talk to her husband. The woman tried to add to the conversation by speaking English but the man constantly said, "I cannot hear you. Are you speaking English?" Her daughter had to repeat everything she said. For him she believed fear of a foreign language made understanding difficult. She went on to say,

> You know it takes a little effort to pay more attention. But some people really freak out and it's not that they have anything against you, it's that when a situation makes them nervous automatically you're going to be uptight and when you're uptight it's going to be harder. Because your accent is going to make them feel bad because they don't understand you. And they don't want to know that they are less smart than the next person that is talking with them. And what makes people uncomfortable is when they feel inadequate. Somehow because you're foreign and have an accent, I have to feel uncomfortable because I can't understand a thing you say. You know what I mean? It not a bad depression but it's not the fault of the guy that can't understand and it's not the fault of the person that had the accent either. So it's one of those things where communication and education And that's what I see. The more exposure the more relaxed and the easier it is.

There was one interviewee who always wished to have her accent because, "It is who I am."

Several interviewees noted that now they see Anglos learning Spanish and they see this as a real plus. Language and communication barriers seemed to be a factor for keeping Anglo and Latino communities segregated.

Summary. Being able to learn English was seen as a necessity for the non-English speaking interviewees. In fact, most of the interviewees considered learning English the number one priority for a successful life in Des Moines. However, finding or being able to get to English classes was difficult. English classes were often not offered at a time when individuals could take them or were in an environment that was uncomfortable for Hispanics. As one Latina suggested, "When Latinos came home they did not have time to go to school. They worked all day and supported the family and they did not have extra time. Work-site classes were suggested as a possible solution for Latinas to be able to get to English classes.

The respondents often learned English on their own by watching TV and conversing with English-speaking people.

The Latinas deemed Spanish was a large part of being Hispanic and many wanted their children to be able to speak it. Many Latinos were often disappointed if the child refused. They found that speaking Spanish or speaking English with a heavy accent was a deterrent for being able to better their lives in Des Moines. Better English-speaking skills generally meant a better quality of life. Additionally, interviewees were pleased to find Anglos who were willing to learn Spanish. Speaking Spanish for the respondents was very important to them, it was the essence of being Latino.

Chapter 6

FINDINGS: DAY TO DAY, *la Vida*

The Latinas discussed personal components of their lives in Des Moines, talking about where they worked, their marriages and families, shopping, medical care, views on illegal drugs, driving their cars, and sadly, death.

Solo Dios Sabe para Quien Trabajas (Only God knows for whom you work)

The interviewees came from all backgrounds and middle, upper, and poor economic status respectively when they came to the United States. Most respondents achieved an assortment of economic advantages while living and working in the United States.

However, work was an issue that came as a conflict for some of the Latinas. Working outside the home was against the Latino culture that stipulated women should not labor outside the home. The primary responsibility for a Latina was to take care of the house, children, and spouse; a career was seen as secondary. Latinas found themselves caught between old and new lives in the United States, many wanting to work and have a career but choosing to stay home with the family.

Again, working outside the home came with a range of consequences for Latinas. Pressures would come from other family members and spouses not to seek work outside the home. Issues about raising children and staying home or finding suitable childcare were prevalent. An American Hispanic who grew up poor stated, "We did not have a television, a phone, or a car." Yet she did not agree that Latinas should be employed outside the home for the economic advantages work provided and had this to say about Latinas working,

> I don't know how they live, the poor ones, the immigrants, because they don't want their women working. The job is for the woman to stay at home with the children. And that is so beautiful and do you know we are losing that part of the culture. Because now the woman has to work. And that's not our culture. You're going to have to understand for them it is taboo--they have broken a taboo. And so our children also could be lost just like the others that were lost because their parents work. And when I see people that they suffer a lot of things in their home because they want to keep the Mother at home more power to you.

One Mexican woman, whose mother, had worked outside the home, discussed the pressure she felt by her mother to stay home. She reported,

> Well I tell you my mom does not think it is right. When my husband was going to college I was working and he wasn't. That to her was like oh 'my gosh.' It did not bother me a bit. I thought that is just the way she was raised. The woman stays at home, although she also worked because she had to. She thinks that I should quit and take care of the children. I think being a Latina and working is somewhat difficult for me.

A young Mexican mother, against her husband's wishes, was looking for a job. The Latina explained, "I am not doing it because we need the money. I'm doing it because I want it." When she left Mexico, she had been a newspaper writer for eleven years on the stock market and she really wanted to work again. The respondent stated,

> I had to quit my job in Mexico. I was a writer for 10 years going on 11, I want to go back to work. I'm. My husband said, "You are so stubborn you always get what you want." It's hard for me with him because he say, " no, no, no." I say, "Okay. Let's talk about it then." He is afraid something will happen to the kids.

The Latina had been recommended as a translator but perceived her English as not good enough, although she would like to do the job. Her husband felt the children needed her more than she needed a job. Yet at the same time the interviewee wanted to get out of the house and be with more people using her English. She felt ambivalent and stated,

> When my baby was a year old, I went to WIC and they told me if I want to work as a translator there, they offer me the job and I say okay I can work. I would like that a lot because I know I would learn a lot of English. But I did not have anyone to take care of the kids. I could not take that job. Right now I would like to just get out of the house. Take my kid with me and now I am looking for daycare. Go there take my

> baby with me. Even for part time. But my husband thinks that if I start working we're going to have problems. Now he knows I'm looking for a job.

A South American who had chosen to work and was a professional, made decisions about her career that would not affect her children, such as not having to travel for her job. The Latina believed strongly that a parent must be available to their children saying, "I strongly believe that if one of the parents travels. The other has to be at home."

There were additional issues that affected the interviewees and work. For a Latina who was supported by her American husband, it was the marriage that had become a barrier for employment. The woman explains,

> I didn't have a work permit so I couldn't work at all while I was married. So I think that was hard also because immigration forced me to not work you know and everybody who gets married to an American you cannot work for a period of two or three months or more like myself. It took me six months in order to work.

Finding work with no training, a lack of education, and minimal language skills were additional burdens other Latinas faced. A Mexican related, "I had nothing. I had a bed but no mattress, and no table. No nothing. The house had an old refrigerator and old stove so I could cook." The Latina further explained that when she divorced her husband she was left with debt to pay. The interviewee who could not speak English had her 14-year-old son go to work to help with family.

> I remember that I was so afraid to talk English on the telephone. I had to ask my son to help me make a list to be able to talk to those I owed money. So I could pay my bills. I tell my son you need to work. I need to sign a permit because he was 14 years old.

The Latina also explained how she found work as a seamstress and convinced the owner to hire her,

> So I think the owner feel sorry for me. She said "What can you do?" I tell her that the dress I have on I make. And I remember she look at the hem and everything. She said, "Okay listen. I will hire for three weeks. So three weeks I can see what she can do." I

> work for her more than 13 years. Oh when I opened my shop she came to the opening.

At the time of the interview, this Hispanic woman owned her own tailor shop and did fittings in nursing homes.

A Central American found Latino business owners shunned her when she tried to do business in the Hispanic community. The Nicaraguan travel agent stated, "They feel the Anglos know more." However Anglo-owned companies used her services and she explained, "When I talked to an American company they took me at face value." Hispanic workers found her through an informal network. "The employees got my name through the grapevine. They all call and get tickets from me, but not the owner." The Latina believed the Hispanic business owners didn't like working with a Latina, "I been trying to get this one business for years. The man won't see me." The interviewee also believed that Hispanics deemed she had it too easy and held it against her stating, "I think it's because of my background. I was married, had a job, a family, money, education."

Additional frustrations were expressed for undocumented workers trained in a field but not able to work in their professions. A Latina stated,

> Many aliens here could contribute so much more, but can't because they don't have the right documentation. So you work in anything you can find. If there could be a way to give permission in the field you were qualified for.

One interviewee worked for a fast food restaurant but was a trained social worker in Mexico. The undocumented respondent could not work in her field or get training for any other work without a legal Social Security card. The Latina worked with falsified papers and a different name explaining, "My college degree was the name of my real name and that's the name I came on my tourist Visa. But to work and have a Social Security Number, I have a different name." This Hispanic and her engineer husband had a comfortable life in Mexico. The

Latina clarified, "We were middle-class not upper or lower." The two planned to go back to Mexico where they believed they could make a better life for themselves, even though they saw their future in the United States. The Latina said, "I would like to go back to Mexico, because I don't have a future here. Not for me. I want to help people as a social worker but I cannot do that here."

Other Latinas discussed the issue of documentation. A young Mexican talked about undocumented Hispanics she worked with in a restaurant, "All the people in the kitchen they are Mexican and illegal. They come without anything. They told me they know people will not like them but it is worth the risk." The young woman argued, "You know it is hard. We're working and we are not doing anything illegal. Why can't they stay here? They're not wasting and playing they are working, but they are always living with the fear of being caught." The Latina went on to say, "They are not cheating or stealing anything. They just want to work. They want to live." Another Latina supported the discussion,

> If these people weren't here you wouldn't have cheap meat because you don't have people to work for it. So why don't we help each other? We are here to stay because you have the jobs. If you didn't have jobs we would not be here.

Another interviewee also talked about the underemployment of Latinos saying,

> We are perceived as problems. Our talents, our gifts, our skills, the ones that we bring with us here are not recognized, are not valued, are not used, are wasted. What a waste. I know for sure workers--I know teachers, I know physicians, I know accountants that are working in an IBP meat packing plant in the production line because they don't have English skills or because they don't have school paper from the United States saying that they are social workers or teachers, or so forth. What a waste of talent!

A Honduran expressed her sadness when she saw Latinos cutting grass or doing other manual work allegorizing, "They don't have another choice. They don't speak English. They don't go to school and learn." However, the woman went on to demonstrate, "We know people they have gone to college. We know one person, he's professional. He's an engineer, a civil engineer. He cleans offices. This man is frustrated and he felt the discrimination."

A Central American who was refused a Visa to work in the United States came anyway. The Latina explicated,

> I went to the embassy first in my country and they did not give me a Visa. I just want to come here and work because I have my son born in my country and I am not married. I went to school to become a secretary but could not find a job because of lack of experience. So I applied in a hotel one of the best in my country. I had to work all night and fell sick because I don't get any sleep. I don't see a future. I really want to leave my country. I am very poor. I decided to come here by Mexico and I save my tips.

The Latina talked about the work in Miami. "I clean house. I don't know I am pregnant and I have a very bad infection in my kidneys. So I don't go to work for a week and the lady who is Cuban was mad. She said she does not want the responsibility of me being pregnant." The Latina found other work at a condominium vacation project for wealthy individuals and was subsequently hired as a full-time personal maid by a couple who owned one of the condominiums. At the time of the interview, the woman was working in a hospital, doing housekeeping part time, in order to stay home with her children. However, the Latina would like to become more professional and wanted to become a nurse.

> Because I work in a cancer floor of the hospital. I see many people who die and many people alone. No family, nobody visit, and I like to go with them. Help them. I wanna do more for them. Sometimes they needed something and I can't do nothing because I just clean.

The woman had been afraid to work for a large company saying, "I was scared because I never worked in a company." The woman feared she would be discriminated against and related an incident, "I remember this lady saying, 'Oh you people coming here to take our jobs.' And I tell this lady it's not true. Because you are American lady, you can go to school." The respondent went on to tell how she would one day be a nurse while this woman still cleaned toilets.

A poor, young, undocumented, non-English speaking, mother from Mexico stated, "I want to work and I hope my children have a profession. I don't want my children to live in poverty." The Latina explained,

> I'm happy here because my husband had to work in the fields and that was hard work to find in Mexico. Here when you work you can eat good food. You work and you have to pay rent and sometimes there isn't enough money for food. My husband would like me to work to help pay bills, but to work I would have to find someone I trust to care for my baby to be able to work.

A teenaged undocumented El Salvadorian wanted to work but could not find a job, she relied on an abusive boyfriend and the father of her baby. The two lived with the boyfriend's mother who received welfare. The Latina explained, "I don't like what he does. He doesn't work. He expects his mom to do all this stuff. Now that he is a dad he should be more responsible. I got into an argument with him and he hit me." The teenager had worked her away across the country, doing odd jobs. She described a job in California, "I got a job selling blankets and clothes on the street." While in Omaha, she stated, "I decided to stay with this couple. She found me a job babysitting. I was getting good money." The Latina was making ends meet in the United States until she got pregnant. She asserted, "It was hard for me not have a job, not to have money and not to have my own place." Because the Latina was undocumented she did not have a legal way to get a Social Security Number, allowing her access to school or work. This young woman was very frustrated with people who were citizens and did not work. She declared, "I'm desperate. I want to get the papers. Cause now they have lots of jobs and people who have papers they don't like to work. And some people, I mean Hispanics, they wanna work. I wanna have a job."

A Mexican in her late 40s grew up poor and had worked since she was very young. The Latina clarified, "I have been working since I was five years old. I am the oldest of the family so I took care of the other kids." The interviewee talked about her work experience in the Midwest, particularly Iowa. The woman and her husband came to the United States the first time, undocumented and not speaking English. The Latina explicated,

> We first lived in Chicago where my husband found work in the fields but after 10 years in Chicago we returned to Mexico and lived for 6 years. But my husband would come to Chicago and work every year in the fields. We came back to the United States and went to Muscatine to work *en la empacador* (in the meat packing plant). We returned to Mexico for another 2 years and again came back to Muscatine because the boys did not want to keep going to school, they wanted to work. They finished elementary school and did not want to go to high school. My son was 16 years old working in the meat packing plant with my husband. In Muscatine we worked *en la empacadora* (in the meat packing plant) we were laid off because of a strike. We worked in the fields of a tomato ranch. We worked--my husband, Junior, and I, the others were home alone.

After the meat packing plant, the woman sewed for a sportswear company when the family moved to Des Moines. At the time of the interview she was babysitting for her oldest daughter's children but wanted to find a job where she was not alone all the time. The Mexican tried working at a fast food restaurant with her daughter but could not stand all day. The Latina described how she had been abused when she worked for the meat packing plant stating,

> They make me work more than the other ones, the Americans. At the plant one day when I was working on the line they wanted me to do the work of two people. It took two people to replace me on the job.

The interviewee went on to talk about other experiences of discrimination with work.

> The first time I was discriminated against I felt so bad. The manager told me I don't think they can hire any Hispanic girl who cannot speak English. I felt so bad so sad. They are talking about me. The Latinos get the worst jobs and the poorest paid jobs. The Latinos have to take the lowest jobs because they have no paper.

Discrimination and abuse in the work place came up several other times. One interviewee told of a single young woman who was recruited to work for a restaurant with promises of more hours and higher wages than where she currently worked. The woman was fired when the owner hired an Anglo friend to work. The Latina stated,

> The owner had a worker quit and asked me to help him find someone. I know this young single mother who has bills and rent to pay. But he said he gonna pay her more and give her 40 hours to work for him. But he does not. The reason he bring a friend a man a close friend. But this person when I see him he supposed to make sandwiches just stick around the corner and read magazines and newspapers. She had quit her job.

An Ecuadorian explained about how difficult it had been for her to get a decent job in Des Moines. After the Latina found a job working in a bank in downtown Des Moines, she talked about how poorly she was treated. The woman told how cold and impossible her job had become because of the way she was treated by co-workers. She stated,

> I understand maybe racism allowed, because I was working for example three months in a job my life was impossible anytime I asked them something you know where was the paper or where something from the file, 'I don't know.' In my office for example, I hear like somebody talking. I was working in my office. "You know what? This Latino people! They mixing up the city. They don't speak the language. They taking our jobs. They doing this, doing that." And then I said, "I am busy. I can't hear anything. But I know they want me to hear." White people think if we are Spanish we are stupid.

This woman had gone from working as a professional for 15 years in a New York City advertising agency to doing floors and housekeeping because she could not find any other job in Des Moines. The interviewee had been turned down at a temporary employment agency that took her resume but would not talk to her when she came in. Her comment, "Cause I could show my resume. As soon as they see me, they don't need nobody. And I have to work like for six months cleaning houses because it was impossible for me to get a job."

The view toward Hispanics and how they were received in the Des Moines' work place was a topic of concern by other interviewees. A Mexican complained that she had been treated poorly at her job and that some of the Anglos refused to work with her. The Latina explained, "They simply don't want to work with you. They just go to another area." A Mexican also had been asked, "Why did you come to my country and why are you taking my job."

The topic of Hispanics taking jobs away from those in the area was something that most of the Latinas had heard. A Latina explained,

> A lot of Americans are upset that a lot of Latinos come here. However, they are not coming for white-collar jobs. They're taking all the dirty work. And the people on welfare don't do them. You know Latinos are willing to take lesser wages because they look different and owners exploit them.

The Latina added a different twist when she said, "But if they don't, it will affect us. It will change the price of fruit, it is going to change the price of everything." Another Latina feared "Latinos coming to this area are poor and take lesser wages. They hold salaries down."

Some of the Latinas worked because wages paid to their spouses were low or the sponsors were not working. Poverty forced the interviewees to find a job, even if it was not culturally accepted. A Mexican mother and wife who was the sole support for her family due to an accident, worked full time in housekeeping for a truck station making $7.50 an hour with minimum benefits. The Latina who had no intention of ever working, learning to speak English, or living in the United States was the breadwinner for a family of four. The change for her was dramatic in that none of the women in her family had ever worked outside the home. The interviewee talked about problems at her job sometimes not getting along with people, some of whom were Latinos. For the Latina the transition to work had been very hard because she did not make enough money, and could not work a specific time of day in order to get more hours and pay, because she had to take care of her husband and children. The Mexican explicated,

> Yes I'm working. As you know my husband cannot work so I have to work to support my family. I work for a cleaning company, doing housekeeping for a gas station. I work good. I feel my job is okay. The only problem is I would like more income. I cannot support our family with that kind of income. They have offered insurance. But I have not been able to take it because I do not make enough money. Sometimes there are problems at work. Sometimes there are people that you don't get along with and many times it's one of our own people, Hispanic people. It is hard for people like us to try here because sometimes our income is not enough or we cannot do things that we would like to do. I would like to have an evening job which will pay more money so I can take care of my children. Of course for example in our country I would not be working and here you have to work. You know so we can survive and move on.

Another Latina lamented that Latinos were not able to get good jobs, "There are not enough opportunities for Latinos but their work ethic is in demand. They are hard workers and they will take any job in the industrial world." The interviewee remarked,

> I think our work ethic is very coveted by others and sometimes I feel like they're saying that the Hispanic community is taking away jobs from people that are local here. The thing of it is, that we feel privileged if we have a job when other people take it for granted.

An interviewee surmised that Latinos take hard, low paying jobs in any condition. She explained, "They are willing to work in any condition when other people do not want to. For example they go into the fields to pick up the corn because others think it is too tough a job. The Mexicans are willing."

Another issue discussed by the Latinas were the taxes taken out of undocumented, Hispanic salaries but no refund claimed. A Latina stated, "Some of them don't get the benefits with the taxes they have to report, they are afraid."

Some of interviewees showed how versatile and flexible Latinos were in finding work and their desire to better themselves. A Latina who never had to work while living in Cuba told about doing whatever it took to be able to bring money home after leaving her country with nothing. Finding a job in the United States was very difficult. The Cuban informed,

> It was very hard. We were not citizens. So then I started doing things like cutting hair, making permanents, doing nails and my husband keep on looking for jobs. But I was doing all of this without a license or without going to school. Which I did not know you need to go to school to do nails so the police got behind us. So then I decided to start doing sewing. Which I did not have the school for this but I love to do it. Thank God. I had success doing sewing. I had a lot of clients. The minimum wage was a dollar but people would pay up to $60 for a dress. But it was made without a pattern. Just the way they wanted the dress. Then my husband found a job cleaning motels fighting with the black people to get a job in the motels. Then he found a job selling material for dresses. Then he went to school to learn to teach Spanish. A town in Minnesota hired him but then it found he needed a teacher's license so he went to get his Masters, he was already a lawyer. And I decided to go too and became an art teacher. When my husband wanted to move to Des Moines I could not find a job teaching so I was hired by the State with the Department of Labor doing OSHA. I'm in charge of child labor. I work with the State for 22 years which I retire. I was not happy being alone at home. My husband died 12 years ago. So I decided to go back to work and start my own business teaching and translating Spanish. I am 72 years old.

Several Latinas respondents had gone to college and were working in companies in the field in which they were trained. A Latina whose husband was also a professional stated, "My degree was five-year accounting. I am a CPA. I work in the branch accounting department. We do all the accounting of all of our branches that are all over the world." Yet another Latina became a nurse, "I worked at a hospital and then with four physicians."

Some of the Latinas had not gone to college but were able to find professional jobs because of their skills, especially being bilingual. A Latina who was quite happy working using her Spanish skills elucidated, "Now that I'm here at the bank they use my services, my Spanish, and I feel valuable to them and they have been great to me." A Honduran who came from a family of professors felt fortunate to be able to use her Spanish for her job, feeling it was a real asset. The Latina explained, "Being Latina in Des Moines means that there'll be more opportunities for me to contribute to my company by using my abilities." She went on to talk about how she sensed she had been rewarded for her work and that she really loved corporate America. The respondent exclaimed,

> You know it is interesting because I have been really lucky. I mean in my career I did not graduate with a business degree. I had to really prove myself at work and I have been rewarded. For that I am really fortunate. I enjoy corporate America. I feel comfortable with it.

The Latina also explained that before she had gone to work she did not know any Hispanics in Des Moines and, because of work, had made Latina friends.

A Latina from Mexico, whose parents were both doctors, came here to use her English and found a position working for the United States District Courts in order to pay for college. The Mexican found her job interesting and was able to help other Latinos by translating for them. Yet the Latina was frustrated because she could not interpret but simply translate words for them. The respondent stated,

> I do know the law and I know how the system works. But they don't. In Mexico we don't have indictments; we don't have a grand jury; we don't have a jury panel; we don't have an appeal. But I cannot translate what is going on. I can just translate words. It is hard but I try my best.

The interviewee continued that she was the only Latina who spoke Spanish and, after awhile, got tired of speaking English. Because of this the Latina felt a sense of rejection, as she could not always relate to her Anglo colleagues. The woman explained,

> People in the courthouse, they are really ignorant of the effort people are doing to live everyday in a country that is not yours and the language there is such a lack of communication. You have a busy day and its like you know I don't want to listen to English. Because I am the only Latina or Spanish-speaking person in the courthouse.

An Argentinean talked about her success working in the United States for the same company for seven years but that it had been hard to get a work permit. The women felt very good about the job she was able to get. The company for which the Latina worked for had branches in Central America, and the Latina surmised that she had become an asset to those offices stating, "I'm happy that I can use all my skills. But I am like an ambassador every time somebody comes and they wonder what to do. I am the unofficial ambassador between the company." Additionally, her family and husband were very supportive of her working. She noted, her mother worked and that her husband had advanced degrees with a professional job. "My husband went for his Masters degree and then ended up having a Ph.D." The Latina expressed her frustration with the process for obtaining a work permit stating,

> We need a place for answers. It took me two years to get a work permit. I was lucky that my husband was working. What do you do if you come as family and you need to eat? So you are almost forced to participate in the illegal program to survive.

A Latina from Argentina and one from El Salvador both believed that there had to be an easier way to get updated professional credentials in order to work in your career. Securing work permits took too much time and sometimes one needed the help of an attorney. One of the respondents explained, "It doesn't happen tomorrow. It takes too much time and time will be saved if people will know where to go. They don't. We need a clearinghouse. Some place to find answers."

The Mexican believed working as a Latina had never been an issue for her saying, "I've been very fortunate that I've never been characterized as anything other than just friendly outgoing nice person. It's obvious that I am Hispanic and I take pride in it, but it's never been an issue for me ever." This Latina experienced success because of her work reporting,

> I got a really nice job, eight to five, Monday through Friday. And soon after I got promoted and I just got my last promotion not too long ago. I've been promoted twice in two years. I think I have arrived my increase in pay has been tremendous; it is fantastic! I can't say enough. It's a nice to work for a company that has all the benefits. I think for me personally doing this it is just the best thing that I ever did.

The respondent also stated that her bilingual skills were recognized and, in fact, opened doors for her employment. The Latina expressed her goals for work, 'I think I want to develop myself to a higher position. Develop myself as a leader. I think I like to take people in the right direction to become leaders themselves."

A young woman from Peru talked about her only work experience being in Iowa and with an Anglo culture explaining, "I came here when I was 18 years old and all the work experience I have was with Americans. I never worked in a Latin environment." The respondent explained her family and husband were very supportive of her working saying,

> My dad was an engineer and my mother a teacher. We were middle-class. It was expected of me that after you graduated from college, you start working. It was never thought I was gonna get married and just stay home. Because even if my husband was making a lot of money I would still work. Because I am a social person, I have to go out and about. I can't just stay home.

A Mexican woman observed that she got satisfaction from her work explaining, "Here it seems to me like you have more qualities a company will recognize. You are able to use your talents. You are given more opportunities to use your skills and grow with a company." The Latina went on to say,

> I think people here live in a better way than down in Mexico. I guess salaries is what I am talking about. I think here they consider your abilities and the skill of people and say okay you are worth it. We want you. And they try and keep you. Down in Mexico they don't do that. It was like, " Okay. This is how much we pay for this position. Take it or leave it.'"

The respondent had one bad experience as a customer service representative when a client refused to work with her because she was Hispanic. The Latina was able to laugh at the experience and related,

> I was shocked because this lady did not want to speak to me because I was Hispanic. She recognized over the phone that I had an accent. I laughed. I was not offended. I thought probably she's never known or been exposed to other cultures and was raised to believe that Americans are better.

A young Mexican woman discussed the difference between working in Mexico versus in Des Moines. In Des Moines a Latina was recognized and paid for her work, but not so in Mexico. The Latina believed that here you were paid for working overtime, and in Mexico that was not the case. The respondent conjectured she was more motivated to work in Des Moines. The Latina clarified,

> In Mexico even if you work more they do not appreciate it. Like if you work 10 hours straight they pay you the same. I think it so important because here they recognize you and you get so motivated. Like if you want to stay here and work 10 hours they pay you but not in Mexico, and the pay is so low. In Mexico they make you work and don't think you are human. People don't do anything but work there.

The Mexican had a supportive family who she said, "Are very proud of her working." Though her upper class, divorced mother has never worked outside the home, the Latina explained, "My mother never worked; she's a volunteer in a hospital." The Latina sensed that cultural changes were going on in Mexico City and more women were working outside the home stating, "Lots more woman are working; it's changing from five to six years ago." The interviewee stated that if she did not marry her boyfriend, she would go back to Mexico and deemed having been in the States, working and learning English, would help her in the Mexico job market. The Latinas stated, "It's so easy if you have a degree in America and you go back to Mexico you can get any job it helps a lot."

A Nicaraguan explained, "My family lived very wealthy at one time, and I have seen the whole thing very, very wealthy and living the big life to very poor when my mom died." The Latina's husband owned a business and she did some work for him but did not give herself credit stating,

> I'm torn between feeling inadequate. I feel like I'm a failure. Because I work for my husband sometimes see I don't give myself enough credit. One of my jobs is to go to grocery stores to bars and restaurants that are owned by Latinos and it is public

> relations to let them know that if they need anything or have any complaints or have a problem with understanding someone. Or at the warehouse if someone calls and they don't understand what they are saying. They call me.

At the same time, she wanted to open a business that would serve the needs of Latinos in the community and was getting no support from her husband. The respondent explained,

> I want to open this place where Latinos come in they talk to them in their own language. And I love talking to people. And I want to have the directions in Spanish and I want TV in Spanish all the soap operas and all the things we care about. Michael said, "You're crazy." I said, "Why shouldn't I have something for Latinos?"

Several of the interviewees expressed the desire to find a position that would be of service to people. As a Mexican stated, "I want to help. I feel the struggle." An El Salvadoran said, "I would like to work. I'd like to have a really nice job because I like to help people."

When one of the Latinas who was a single mother came to Des Moines, she worked in lots of odd jobs as well as her full-time job. The Honduran explained, "I came here and everything was going well because I was doing a lot of work on the side for cash. I've always worked very heavy duty jobs landscaping, painting, and stuff like that." The Latina prided herself in always being able to get jobs but believed she was slower at processing her duties because she thought in Spanish. The respondent described,

> I've always found work and I've always been able to learn what I am supposed to do. But I'm a little slower, I think, than some just because I'm always processing. Even to this date I do a lot of my thinking and speaking in Spanish.

Simultaneously, the respondent got frustrated at work because she was often asked to translate documents. However, translating was not part of her job, and she was not paid extra or recognized in any other way for helping. The interviewee expounded,

> You have bilingual employees you give them a set of duties yet you ask them to do those same duties or others in Spanish translations interpretations yet you don't pay them any different. And we're in the middle of the country where bilingual staff is very difficult to find. They need to determine what kind of penny you are willing to pay. Because if you do phone work and you contract, you're going to pay probably

> 300 times more than what you pay me. I am not saying give me the money. I'm saying give me an incentive to stay here and not feel totally overwhelmed because everyone in the company who has a bilingual need calls me.

The respondent felt very marketable in the Des Moines area and was looking for other employment explaining, "We're highly marketable here but we're not valued. We are not (valued) if I move to Florida, I'm nothing. But we do have potential here as far as being marketable and make more money." In this Latina's case, her mother had been very entrepreneurial and her father respected her but others in her family did not. The Latina stated,

> My father respects me a great deal. He's amazed that I've purchased a home and that I do a lot of the work that I saw him doing in construction. Some of the females in my home they never worked outside the home don't get it and feel maybe I will not raise my children well. I tell them to go to hell.

Another issue for this Latina was the clash of Latino and Anglo cultures in the workplace. Her example was the following, "My supervisor makes fun of me. She say, 'yea do like her huggy, huggy, kissy, kissy.'"

Another Latina who had a second job teaching at a fitness club, noted that she was the only Hispanic saying, "I'm a fitness instructor out there. I'm the only Hispanic, probably the only one with dark hair."

A Mexican woman who came to Des Moines with very little money created a career for herself by volunteering at her children's school and ended up creating a full time position of helping Latinos who have come to Des Moines. The Latina told her story,

> I say listen, I know I don't know English but I am willing to take the time to translate the documents that you send home to Latino parents. I volunteered for two years and then a position was created and by then there were four or five ESL elementary schools that I needed to serve all those schools with a translation. Documents sent home were the documents they needed from their countries of origin. My husband took the work fine. We needed the money for school. We did not have anything it

> took a while to start a household and we had debt. So I needed to work. I would work and the children would be in school.

The Latina had become a full-time advocate for immigrant rights using the skills she learned, overcoming obstacles to get an education and employment. The Mexican's own immigration issues made her a self-trained expert on immigrant status and rights. The interviewee expounded,

> I wanted to find a way to shorten the time for me to get my papers, even though I did not know English. I went to the public library in Des Moines and I started reading every single book about immigration that I could find.

An El Salvadoran talked about the drive to succeed in the United States and the sacrifices made to get ahead stating, "We left because we wanted to succeed." The respondent was driven to get a job in her trained profession as a pharmacist. This meant learning English, taking the foreign Pharmacy exam, the TOEFEL, (an English proficiency test), the Pharmacy boards, and fulfilling the legal requirements to practice in Des Moines. This Latina had a Mother who had worked outside the home and who pushed her to get a profession; her sister had become a chemical engineer. The Latina repeated what her mother had told her,

> Try to do as much as you can. If you find a rich guy, great! You don't have to work. If you find a guy that works beside you, that's wonderful. And if you find somebody that doesn't want to work and you have to support him, hey, you'll survive.

A Mexican American was hired by the state to work with the Latino population. The Latina had doubts that there were any Latinos in the State and questioned, "There's Latinos in Iowa?" Although she initially turned down the offer she eventually changed her mind. Coming to Des Moines was a huge event for her and her family as it was the first time she had ever left her adult children and grandchildren and felt very "un-Latina." The Hispanic stated,

> I still made the break and that was a very unusual thing for a Latina to do. I followed a career. It was frightening in a sense but it was also exciting and they were excited for me. They felt good about themselves through me.

One of the Latinas discussed the rules of work. The Latino community did not understand about working in the United States saying,

> Too many times people tell me that when Latinos have a relative that dies somewhere, they take off for two or more weeks and then come back and think they're gonna have a job and it's gone. And they don't know to ask them if they understand the policies of where they're gonna work. Have you asked about what their policies about leaving, absence, sick leave, maternity leave? They might not know any of these things. So where they work do they have an understanding of what the rules are? Again it is all about rules.

A Cuban surmised that Hispanic workers needed to know they could not just take off and visit relatives and expect to have their job when they returned. Latinos needed to be educated on how business operated and employees were handled. The interviewee stated, "You're working and you have to go because your mother dies in Mexico you cannot take off without telling the office. If you come back you don't have a job." At the same time a Honduran believed that, "Businesses need to understand that when an employee asks for time to travel back home it cost a great deal of money and it is a long ways to go so they need the time to go." Another Latina included, "I have been working at my job so long I hear people say, 'Well he is leaving the country. Oh I cannot believe he's going to a funeral for two weeks.' Well culturally it is that people don't understand."

Job training for the Hispanic community was another request from interviewees. One Latina suggested having a video available on Des Moines and its culture in the States' workforce development. Another comment was, "Support Latinos to work in the jobs they are trained for in their native country." One respondent considered that so much talent was wasted with Des Moines immigrants that she wanted, "To start by doing an inventory of our talent gifts and skills. What we bring over. Not the ones you want; the ones we have. What can we do?"

A Mexican woman wanted to see if there could be help with job placement with accompanying decent salaries. Another Mexican wanted a place to go for job training where she would be able to get skills to help her get a higher paying job. Several individuals wanted to know how to get better skills to be able to move up in their lives. Yet another issue relating to jobs was the idea to help Latinas start up a factory. The Mexican woman expounded,

> My dream is to one day teach the people sewing. I wanna have a factory for making dresses. I sew here. I design, cut. To hire people like my employee she sewing very fast very well but she never cut. So I need a cutter and I tell her how.

The topic of working was important and put in context with the economic backgrounds of the Latinas. Many of them, but definitely not all, having grownup in poverty, offered insights to why employment was such a factor when there was a cultural bias against it. As one Latina remembers about growing up poor,

> We didn't have much to eat, and we didn't have sheets on our beds, we didn't have any blankets, we had one sofa, and only one or two beds. Hardly any utensils--spoons and forks. How did we ever survive?

Nevertheless there were interviewees who came from quite wealthy families. A respondent from a well-to-do family stated, "My father had a very good business selling big trucks and my mother did not work. We had three maids and a nanny." When she fled Cuba to come to the United States she explained, "You could just bring forty pounds so we didn't even bring suitcases. We put everything in bags made of material so we had to just weigh our clothes. We didn't bring any toys." A Central American came from an upper middle class family and informed,

> My father worked for *Banco Nacional de Nicaragua*. We had the laundry and ironing lady that came so many days a week and the gardener that came so many days and a

> chauffeur who took us to and from school. Go to the grocery store. I had no idea what I was looking for at the grocery store. I had never gone. The maid did it at home.

Many of the interviewees' lives did become economically better by coming to the United States but not all. A Latina from Mexico explained,

> My situation was very different from most Mexicans who come here that come from provinces where there was no hope or work maybe no running water. They have so much more here than they did there. Here is where the future is. But for those of us who had things in Mexico it isn't the greatest. Better there for me. When you come from a city and have studied you can have the same thing there and better because it is your country and your language.

Summary. How do Latinas get jobs or protect themselves from an abusive employer if they cannot speak to them? How do Latinas support themselves if they're undocumented, in Des Moines, and want to stay? English skills and the undocumented worker were the most difficult scenarios to address for the immigrants. The worker was needed, whether or not they were legal or could speak English. The Latinas could usually find a job in Des Moines. In fact, a couple of Latinas who were undocumented found jobs by using false documentation. Moreover, immigrants without papers constantly run the risk of deportation.

Another issue addressed in the interviews was the underemployment of Latinos. Hispanics may find a job that pays minimum wage but were not able to move up to a better salary. Latinas had a difficult time finding jobs that would train them for new skills in order to acquire an even better paying job. Employers were content to have Latinos fill bottom-rung jobs, but were reluctant to help them move beyond. Companies didn't want to lose the affordable Hispanic employee who would do work that no one else would. Real job training for Latinas did not exist except for those women who worked in career positions. However, many of the respondents reported they were treated better and had a higher wage than they could have found in their former country. Some Latinas also had to deal with discrimination in the work force, either because they were being poorly treated on the job or did not get a job because of their accents.

Latinas had outside issues to contend with. A few of the Latinas had to deal with the cultural issue of working outside of the home. The interviewees had husbands who did not want their wives finding jobs that would take them away from their children. Other interviewees had to put up with abusive employers who made them work harder and longer than other workers were and other kinds of discriminatory behaviors.

Nevertheless, there were also a fairly large group of interviewees who found great jobs and were very happy with their employment. The respondents believed they were paid good salaries, with the opportunity for advancement, were treated as professionals, and appreciated for the jobs they did. The Latinas were able to use their Spanish and English skills and felt valued.

School or Babies

Education became a vast, multi-dimensional topic and was desired by each Latina interviewed. For some Hispanics, getting an education had become difficult simply because they were women. Families, particularly fathers, had not allowed interviewees to go higher than elementary school because they were female. Their families did not deem education important for them. What would a Hispanic woman do with an education when she was going to marry and have children? Most of the respondents wanted to further their education for themselves and their children. The level of education for the interviewees varied from third grade to an advanced degree. Where the Latinas went to school, how much they studied and what they studied, was a mix. Still one of the biggest reasons given for not going back to school or continuing an education in Des Moines was the inability to speak English. Learning English first was a necessary tool for education in the United States.

Several of the respondents had gone to private Catholic schools in their country of origin and had to study English for several years.

A couple of Latinas talked about differences between schools in Des Moines and their native countries. A few of the interviewees deemed Des Moines was behind in education. A woman from Honduras ascertained, "It baffled me that one of the strongest countries would have such ignorant and uneducated children." A young Mexican was amazed at how uneducated her peers at college were about her culture and was shocked when someone asked if her native country had cars or ice cream. The Latina related,

> There are people that they ask, "Oh do you have milk shakes? Do you have cars?" I don't get mad but it's like everybody from Mexico they don't know we have different things. I don't get mad cause I'm like yea I drove a donkey.

A woman from Argentina talked about the lack of education for people in the Midwest and was disappointed when they put all Latinas into the same category, with little understanding of the various cultures. She said,

> The lack of education for people in the Midwest, people in the United States to lump everybody together and make labels and to stick people in boxes. There's no two Latinas the same. They're completely different you can't put them in a box and put a label on them and say you understand who they are. Because you can't it's like saying, every snowflake is the same cause it's snow. Every snowflake is different than the other.

A Nicaraguan woman brought her sister to live in Des Moines. Her sister was tested to ascertain her grade placement and tested into a higher grade. The Latina explained,

> When she came she was a sophomore when I called the school they told me that they didn't know since she was coming from Nicaragua whether she could be a sophomore here or would have to be a freshmen. And I asked that she be tested to see where she was. So she came in and was made a Junior.

This same person talked about the dictator Zamosa and the quality of public education they enjoyed in her native country, even though it had been under a dictatorship for 40 years. The Latina illustrated, "Even our maid's children went to public school. They had to wear uniforms, but they were taught." She noted how relaxed the Catholic schools were in Des Moines in comparison to Latin America relating, "So here comes my sister going to a Catholic school with half her thigh showing. If I did that in Nicaragua they would send me home."

A Mother noted how different subjects were taught in Des Moines. The Latina lamented that she could not help her son with his homework because it is so different. She stated

> I can't help my son with division here because I learned it differently. It's funny how they put things here like where they put the numbers for division. But in my country we do it like this the order of the numbers is completely different.

A Mexican woman surmised that the Hispanic immigrants in Des Moines were not educated, saying, "The Latino people that are in Des Moines are from very poor resources and they are not educated." An El Salvadoran agreed saying, "The Hispanic community in Des Moines is undereducated." A young Mexican going to college was adamant that more educational opportunities be available for Hispanics with financial aid or access to student loans. The Latina was upset about how hard it was to get any financial aid as a non-resident saying,

> "How are they supposed to go to school? How did the Latino community in Des Moines ever go to college or ever get any help?" The Latina also believed her school in Mexico was too easy, and she had to come to the United States to get an education.

The Mexican explained, "Since I was little I have gone to school and for me it was easy. I kinda like to challenge myself to do stuff. And in Mexico it was too easy for me. There was nothing to challenge."

Another Latina pointed out that the lack of education was keeping the Des Moines Latino population in low paying jobs. The Mexican elucidated, "For the most part the low end of the jobs that are available to Hispanics was because of a lack of education. I'd like to see these people grow." An additional interviewee stated, "You know, I think education is power. Hatred is ignorance." The respondent continued, "We need awareness, the need is for equity not equality. Embrace diversity but really strive for equity and education really would be a bridge for that." Another Mexican sensed that, "You can study a career and there (in Mexico) it isn't so easy. There if you don't have money you can't study a career. It's expensive and you just can't. I see that here you can because the government will help you."

A Hispanic woman in her 20s was angry with her Mexican parents for not pushing her to go on to college. Education for their daughter was not a priority as with some other first generation Mexican immigrants. This Latina stated,

> I saw my friends that their parents were born in the States, Mexican but born in the States, and they say, "you know what? You're going to college whether you like it or not." It is kinda stressful because I have my upbringing at home and then outside I have my friends that are going to college. Know what I wish they told me after high school you're going to college whether you like or not.

At the time of the interview the Latina had taken classes at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) but had not finished a degree.

A college degree from the United States was coveted and thought to help with careers in the interviewee's respective countries if they returned. Two Mexican Latinas were going to college in Des Moines after having lived here in order to learn English. One of the individuals stated, "It's so easy if you have a degree in America and you go back there. You can get any job. That helps a lot."

A woman from Cuba who had lived in the United States was sent to get her Masters in Education through a special program at the University of Minnesota. The Latina had gone to a private Catholic school in Cuba and had gotten a degree in Business but could not find work in the United States until she completed her Masters in Education and became a teacher. The Cuban remarked, "So we got our Masters degree in education. And my major was Spanish and my minor was Art." For this woman, education was very important. In fact, when she fled to Miami from Cuba she was able to find private education for her children and at no charge. The Cuban commented, "Then my kids were in the private school because my father had a sister who was a Nun so the kids were there. It was very expensive but they didn't have to pay." This individual also discussed how she was perceived as uneducated because she was foreign, remarking,

> One day I got tired of everything so I told a man at work I was not a migrant. I am Cuban and I have a degree from this country. But they think they cannot believe that you have a degree. You know he was for a week thinking that I was a migrant and I didn't have an education.

Several women interviewed came from families with strong educational backgrounds and advanced degrees. A young Mexican's parents were both doctors and stated, "I come from a society where everyone goes to college, have Masters and Ph.D.'s." Others had mothers who had gone to boarding schools in the Midwest and had helped the Latinas to go to United States' schools to learn English. A woman from Honduras explained, "My mother lived in the Midwest, in Sioux Falls when she was 15. She went to a boarding school there. Her English was okay. But now she has a Masters from Kansas University and a Ph.D."

A couple of Latinas met their respective husbands after coming to the United States to learn English. A Peruvian came to study English in East Dubuque, stayed to go to college at the University of Dubuque, graduated with three degrees, and met her husband. The respondent explained,

> I got three degrees, communication, international studies, and French. I came to the Midwest because there were not a lot of Hispanics or Spanish-speaking cause I wanted to learn English. So they sent me to East Dubuque. I had gone to an all girls school that spoke French back in Peru. I did not need credits. I was a senior in high school. I ended up applying for a scholarship and got it. Started at the University of Dubuque and that's where I met my husband.

Certain Latinas who had advanced degrees from their respective countries were forced to go back to school because they could not speak English or the United States did not recognize the schooling they had received. An Argentinean came to the United States as a CPA with the proper schooling and credentials, but could not speak English. She won a scholarship at the University of Minnesota to study English and then worked for a bank. The Argentinean explained,

> I came a week after taking my last exam from college my priority was to finish my degree at home. I have a five-year degree in accounting and finance. I am a CPA. I did not have time to study English. I went to a private Catholic school and the Nuns spoke French. I came here to do something and won a scholarship to learn English and finished in eight months.

The Latina had raised her daughter to understand the importance of an education and was at the University of Iowa at the time of the interview. The woman exclaimed, "Going to college was very important."

Other Latinas discussed not being able to use their degrees in Des Moines because they were not recognized or were undocumented. A Hispanic lamented, "I can only expect money, no more with the type of job I can get here. I have studied but I can't get that kind of work here. I would like to do better professionally."

Several Latinas expressed the desire to go to college and get a degree. A few individuals had gone to DMACC to get college course work started, but for varying reasons had not finished. A Mexican said, "Actually I have gone to college but did not complete my degree. Then I came to Iowa and have been going to DMACC." A Central American explained, "I did go back to school to take foreign languages, and some journalism but didn't get into the nitty gritty of it. Then I went here and took classes at DMACC. Never finished anything, too many interruptions."

Cultural issues were also a factor in how much education an individual received. A woman from Peru said,

> I see that they marry really young, and that's the whole Latina culture. When you marry young, your husband works and you stay home. And I would like to see that to change in the future. Going to college, working, and also getting married and having kids. I think they can have both.

In another conversation she stated,

> I think we see more women wanting to go back to school and get a degree, but I don't see as many Latinas going for a Master's. Not yet. And there's a lot of women out there that probably don't have even an undergraduate and they are just working.

Another Latina opined, "More of the Latina women that are coming to the States have either been educated at home or have gone through education here, regardless where they got it, they're more educated than their ancestor." A Mexican woman adds to the cultural issues stating,

> I think it's a part of the cultural issue on how women have been raised before like oh, you're not good to study. You will marry anyway, you're gonna end up staying home. Why do we need to spend money on you to study? So when they were little they just keep telling them that and they just make them believe themselves, yea that is true. Like I said, now women in Mexico, younger generations, that's changing. Now girls they're smart enough that they said that was not true I am gonna own someday my business maybe I'm going to be a good businessperson. I want to go to college. I want to study. I want to do this.

An American Latina talked about how she had to drop out of college to put her two brothers through college. As an adult she raised two teenagers by herself, went back to school, and completed her degree. She remembered a conversation with her mother as she was dying and the two of them asked each other why she had sent her brothers to school and not go herself? The Latina reminisced, "It's just the thing to do. They were the men of the house; they're gonna be head of households, someone's gonna take care of me I suppose. That was the thought."

A Mexican woman who did not speak English and only finished sixth grade was sending her last child, a daughter, to college; she was the first in the family of five to go. Sending her daughter to college had been very difficult for her and she would have actually been happier if her daughter had married her undocumented boyfriend and stayed home. The daughter had a scholarship at Iowa State University and she agreed to let her go after a year of struggling with the decision. Yet the respondent talked about herself saying, "Now I am very sorry that I did not go to school when I was young, when I had a memory because I have not been able to learn English and I know I need it."

Wealth, or lack thereof, was not indicative of the level of education achieved by Latinas. Some of the well-to-do Latinas were not allowed to go to college but other interviewees who had been poor were not stopped; there was no one to say no. A woman from South America who had been very poor explained, "I have a degree in Business Administration. If you want to be somebody, don't ask. You have to do it yourself. You have to go to school and finish college. My country was very poor; we are very poor." A woman from a well-to-do family in Nicaragua explained,

> My mom when she graduated from high school wanted to go to France and become a doctor. Her grandfather would not allow it. He felt he was going to leave them so

> much money she did not need to become a doctor. That mentality you know. He only had granddaughters; he never had any boys and because they were girls they could not go and become what they wanted. They had to become housewives.

One of the appellants from Central America went to a boarding school in England to study English but felt it was a waste. Her Mother had a rule that in order to go to college one had to learn English and she had wanted to learn French. The interviewee had gone back to her country to go to college but at that time the school went on a strike that did not end for some time. The Latina ended up getting married to an American and moving to Des Moines. However, her husband did not want her to go to college. She elucidated, "When I came here I thought I would go to school, and my mother was willing to pay so I could go to Drake, but my husband didn't want me to." This Latina was very frustrated that she did not have a college degree, though she had taken classes at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC). She wanted to go to school but had no confidence to do so, saying, "It's so scary. I would like to go to school so I feel good about myself."

A Latina from Honduras had a similar but somewhat different story on education. This Latina wanted to study architecture in her country but her mother said no and had her come to the United States to learn English. Again this Latina ended up getting married and not going to college. This individual also had an unusual background in that she did not go to a Catholic school but attended an Adventist Evangelical School because of her Father's conversion to the Adventist faith. The Latina had grown up in a home where none of the women had gone to college but were able to support their families through careers. She said, "My family are people who only has some secretarial skill and never went to college." This Latina attended DMACC but had not completed a degree.

A Latina who had to drop out of school because of her parents, started working at the age of 14 because an employer sent her back to school to learn. The Mexican elucidated, "The manager decided that I had some intelligence and would send me back to school in the afternoon and in the evening I would take accounting classes."

Another Mexican had a similar experience with an employer who helped her with classes and she finishing high school.

> I went to my high school and then graduated like a secretary. Then I started doing work as a secretary right there at the newspaper. Over the years I started taking courses here and there. I never went to college to do it no. They gave me the chance to take the classes and that's why I started writing.

A Mexican Latina went to a primarily Latino and black high school in Texas and after graduation went into law enforcement. The woman had a full-time job, a small child, became responsible for taking care of her teenage siblings, and could not finish school. The woman remembered, "So here I am dealing with teenage issues, me being a young mother, having a full- time job, going to school at night. It was difficult."

A few of the Latinas interviewed graduated from a secondary school in their country that was job related, like a secretarial school. However, the jobs they found after graduation did not pay enough to support themselves. A Honduran said, "I went to school and graduated as a secretary. I work hard for four years but I can't buy a home. I can't buy nothing because there is no money." One of these Latinas worked at a hospital cleaning and wanted to become a nurse. She explained,

> I take English classes right now but the hospital they wanted to give me an opportunity for classes to be a certified Nursing Assistant. But I needed to stay full time. But I can't there is no one to take care of the children. I want to be a nurse. In six years I'm going back to school.

Another Latina from Mexico talked about how she wanted to go to work and had not realized the importance of college, especially after she moved to the United States. The interviewee stated, "The only thing I wanted to do when I finished high school was to work. I guess I did not realize the importance of going to college. I never thought I would end up here anyway."

Several Latinas went to only a few grades of school and later learned to read and write. A woman stated, "You know, since I started to learn how to write and read, I write when I feel something and when I have a problem."

Another interviewee, who did not speak any English, finished elementary school and was the sole supporter for her husband and family. She did not see any future for her in school and she had no time. The woman outlined her schedule,

> I get up early in the morning at 6:30 a.m. to wake up the children . . . I'll get them ready for school, and I come back, I'll do the house chores and then help my husband. And I'll go to the store or take him to the doctor's office, whatever he needs. I prepare the food. Then go back and get the children from school. Then I drop them off and then I go to work. I come back at midnight or 12:30 a.m. I give him his therapy and about 2:00 a.m. I go to bed. And this is my daily routine. We know there is schools, really there's no time.

Her son and daughter were enrolled in school. She said,

> Basically, my dreams and my hopes are that my children can make a better future here because we do not have anything to offer them. That they study because we know that here without studies and without the language skills we cannot get ahead but hopefully they will.

A 19 year old El Salvadoran who came to the United States undocumented tried to go to school several times in several cities under very difficult circumstances. For varying reasons, she was unable to finish but had the goal of completing her education. The young woman had no job, no education, a small baby, and a boyfriend who had beaten her. This woman wanted to get an education and saw no way to get it done as long as she was undocumented.

Other Latinas interviewed talked about college for their children and one problem that arose for them was that their child moved away and lived in a dorm. Latinos preferred that their children stay and live at home while taking classes. The idea of a child living away from home at college was very foreign. The Central American explained,

> In my country when a boy or girl finishes high school they start to find a job. And if they want to go to college they have to work in the mornings. They have to work in the day and go to school at night. But they never go from the house.

A few Latinas talked about their children in Des Moines schools and stated that for the most part school was good. Perhaps rough at the first, but for the most part, children were doing well. A Mexican woman said, "At the beginning the children would complain because of the change and it was hard for them. And when they were adjusted then it was not a problem anymore." One Latina talked about abuse her child suffered at school because they were Hispanic. The respondent related,

> The reason I became a volunteer at my children's school was because the first day that I took my children to the school we had a very difficult experience. I took first the little one and as I was walking him to his classroom and we were reaching the area, a boy about eight or nine looked at us very hateful and shouted at us. "You dumb Mexicans I'm going to ask my Dad for his rifle to kill you all." I was afraid something would happen to my children.

The woman discussed the fact that when she sent her child to school Mexico she did not worry. Mexican schools were allowed to discipline and to instill values and in the United States' schools were not. The Latina asserted, "In our country, teachers and school personnel were allowed to discipline our children. You leave your children at the door of the school and you don't have to worry."

An Ecuadorian talked about being the oldest of 10 children and the fact that she attended college and graduated with a business degree stating,

> And this is not a story, this is real. We have to eat a little rice the whole day for the ten kids. I don't eat since I was the oldest. My God, this was not a life. No. I don't know why but I grew up all my life in a Catholic school. I went through primary and then graduated from high school. I had to go to college. I don't care. I was strong.

This Latina encouraged her niece to go to school and become a professor. The woman's son was going to college classes that were paid for by his employer, an insurance company in Des Moines. This same woman went to New York unable to speak English, but was able to get hired by a company that sent her to school for three years for training and English classes. The Latina said during the interview, "Everybody here, Hispanic people cleans floors and toilets, but I'm not gonna do that because I went to school for so many years (not) to do that."

A Central American believed education made a big difference in how people were treated. The Latina explained, "I think having an education makes a big difference. I've seen doctors that were black and they're treated well because they have an education."

Several interviewees addressed the importance of getting Hispanic children to school and getting an education. However, some Hispanic immigrants believed that working was more important than education. A Latina offered,

> I know many young like my son's age. They come and don't wanna go to school. The parents they don't say nothing. They are happy the children go to work and they don't care what they do for the rest of their lives.

Conversely, there was a desire to have children graduate from high school and go on to college. A Latina from South America stated, "My son he called and cried. He's getting help from his work to go to college." Another Latina from Central America said, "My son he go to college maybe DMACC."

Many respondents sensed also that there was a population of poor Hispanic immigrants who did not understand the need to get an education for long-term advancement in the United States. A Mexican stated, "The Hispanic community here in Des Moines are poor and not educated." Education was viewed as a luxury in their native country or parents were working so much, they did not seem able to address the educational needs of their children. A woman commented, "When Latinos come here they no have the time to go to school." One comment made by a woman who had been here for some time was, "Latinos need to learn to read and write."

There were obstacles to obtaining that education, however. A woman from Mexico wanted assistance for her children to go to college but the whole concept was so foreign she did not know how to go about helping them to apply, much less get scholarships or financial aid. A need for the Hispanic community was to address Latino children not getting support to go to school and dropping out because of it. A Central American stated, "Why the teenager leave school no one cares, the parents is not home. And the Spanish teenager is why so easy to get into drugs." Additionally, a Hispanic woman interested in going to college or getting an advanced degree battled the cultural bias against her getting more education. She was viewed as a potential wife and stay-at-home mother.

An idea mentioned by the interviewees was to use college courses as a way to introduce cultural issues to the public. Colleges could offer classes on how to understand and work better with the Latino community, as well as classes on cultural differences. A woman from Mexico felt, "At least teachers in the public schools should be taught about Latino culture and that there was Latino history here in Iowa." A Hispanic woman said, "I think the way to teach culture of others was to start them in schools." Teaching respect for each other was a topic a Mexican woman wanted to see taught in Des Moines. The respondent stated, "We are not all illegal but we are treated as if we are. People need to learn respect."

Summary. Education was both a desire and a concern of the interviewees who viewed it as a tool to help them better their lives. The respondents believed that the more education a Latina acquired the more it allowed them a better life style. English-speaking skills were paramount in order to access education in Des Moines.

Latinas did not feel they were the only ones who needed additional education, however; they deemed the non-Latino community needed more cultural understanding and foreign language skills. This type of education would foster a better appreciation between the different ethnic groups in Des Moines.

The Latinas were greatly concerned about the low level of Latinas in higher education and the number of young Hispanics dropping out of high school. The respondents' considered education for Latino children a pressing need. Latino parents needed to become involved with the education of their children, especially their daughters, and understand how important an education was in the United States.

Catholic?

The Latinas had a strong belief in God and were fairly religious. The women held church in high esteem. Religion was a crucial part of their everyday lives. Some of the interviewees had religious altars in their homes where they prayed on a daily basis. The church was a big component in the Latinas' culture. Religion was not always viewed as a personal issue but a cultural one as well. Religion, especially going to church, was also a social outlet, an opportunity to get together with family and friends.

The majority of the interviewees believed in God and desired to include religion in their lives. One woman stated, "I think I have a very strong faith in God. That I feel taken care of by a higher being." Another said, "I prayed the rosary every night when I was in the fourth grade. I find a lot of comfort in religion, in God." And another, "See I believe in God very much." An Ecuadorian believed God took care of her and gave her direction to help others saying, "God is going to help me." A mother explained, "I'm very devoted to God. That's my priority right now in life. I have found that there's more than all this and I was fortunate to enough to find out what Jesus has done."

Most, but not all of the Latinas were raised Catholic in their country of origin. One individual declared,

> Part of it is the deep-rooted religious beliefs. Because in the States you know there is no religion in the schools. Back home there was from day one. You say a prayer before every class and before you go home. So it's ingrained in you.

Another said, "Oh my God, everybody knows everybody and you do certain rituals that you do. And I think it has to do with having common religion having that Catholicism. Really brings people together." And another Latina explained, "First of all when I came (to Des Moines) I looked for a church because I like going to church, I am very Catholic."

Social lives of the respondents were tied to their church. An interviewee from Cuba explained that it was the church that gave her a chance to meet people when she came to Des Moines. Another respondent said, "You're going to go to church to meet people and we do that, go to church to socialize." Another woman agreed for a different reason, "I see here you go to church on Sunday, but not because you really want to, but rather what else are you gonna do." A Latina explained, "You're going to the church to meet people, and we do that. Go to the church to socialize." An Ecuadorian stated, "The main thing I did here was go to church and I know I'm gonna have friends there. It is not only a matter of religion it is that the human being needs company." A Mexican stated that religious practices were a reason for having parties; it gave Latinos an excuse to celebrate. She stated,

> Like now we went to Mexico and went to church more times in a month than a whole year. My son did his first communion and my daughter had confirmation and then we baptize my sister's little boy. We went every week and always had a party.

Holiday celebrations sometimes had a religious component. One woman prayed with her children on New Year's Eve, saying, "I made it a practice to pray with my kids for the New Year, not that I pray every day but I figure some good long ones for the rest of the year." A Central American explained that for religious holidays you can get time off saying, "You know you're always going to benefit by the religious traditions. You know you get Holy Week off. Even if you don't want to be Catholic, you get an extra week off."

Several who were raised Catholic, and even went to Catholic schools, changed religions when they came to the United States. The Latinas who made a transition in their churches became Presbyterian, Lutheran, or non-denominational evangelical. Reasons for leaving the Catholic Church varied. A Latina from Mexico said her Anglo husband did not like the Catholic Church and she became Lutheran. The Latina stated, "He does not like the Catholic Church at all." The Mexican continued,

> To be honest with you, I never got anything out of the Catholic Church. I used to always, growing up I used to hate going there. They always used to tell you, "don't do this don't do that." Now that I am older I can choose.

The respondent also explained how upset her mother would be if she knew she had left the church, "My mom does not know we are Lutheran and would probably freak." A respondent, who left the Catholic Church said, "I left the Catholic Church because once I left school, there were too many things that bothered me." Another said, "My life has changed extremely since, it's a cliché, since I've become a Christian; it's just incredible. Left my Catholic roots behind." A Latina from Central America said the church had abandoned her when she needed it most saying, "I didn't really get the support that I expected from the church." The interviewee went on to say, "I just really had this blind faith that if you prayed over and over again, things would be okay. And now it's more of a one on one with God." One woman from Mexico talked about how she had gone to a Catholic Church and did not feel welcomed saying,

> At the beginning we went of course to the Catholic Church because we were raised Catholic. We thought it was important to start making connections in our church here. But we were not welcomed. We were the only Hispanics in the church and it was uncomfortable everybody watched us.

The Latina made the decision she would not put her children through the rejection saying, "I'm not going to expose my children to that kind of social embarrassment." The Latina left the Catholic Church but found it difficult to find any church that gave her and her family spiritual support. The Latina explained, "We ended up not having a spiritual place to go to fulfill that need and what we would do was to pray at home and read things in our own language. But we could not do it in this community." Still another woman left the Catholic Church after her son had died and she was upset with God. She said,

> I don't wanna go to church. I even grew up in a Catholic school. I leave the church seven years ago. I had a period of time after my son die that I was very upset with God. I did not want to go to church. I grew up all my life Catholic and I don't want to go to church.

Another interviewee left the Catholic Church because she had a choice of religions living in the United States. She explained, "Ninety nine point nine percent of the population in Argentina were Catholic so you don't have a choice. That's why when you come to the United State you have a choice. I decided to make a choice." Another said she left her country because the Catholic Church stood by and allowed the corrupt government to imprison young who opposed it. Young people disappeared and the church did nothing. She commented, "*El Madres de Clase Mayo.* There was a time where students at University were persecuted in Argentina because of their political beliefs and the church supposedly knew about it and they didn't do anything about it."

One of the issues with the Catholic Church for respondents was birth control. A Mexican mother stated,

> I think once they have seven kids, which I hate about Mexicans too, they have so many kids you cannot afford them you know. And they keep having kids. That just bugs the heck out of me. They have nothing to eat but they're still having kids. They don't even use birth control. When I told my mom that, I was like, "oh no." She said, "You're not supposed to do that. You're Catholic." I'm like, "the hell with that I can barely handle two."

An interesting phenomenon arose during the interviews when a couple of individuals who had left the Catholic Church explained that they still kept some of the rituals of the church such as crossing themselves. A respondent explained, "The cross. That's Catholic. I still do it but I'm Lutheran."

There were several who were Catholic but not deeply committed to the church, "I went to all-Catholic schools and being a predominantly Catholic country it was, you know, there was a stigma to it. I always really didn't care." Another said, "I'm a 'cafeteria Catholic' I just pick what I like." One Latina went back and forth between Methodist to Catholic because she and her husband could not decide on a church, he was Methodist and she was Catholic.

A few of the interviewees believed that God had intervened on their behalf. One woman explained that she deemed that God had directed her husband to her stating, "God helped me. It was like he got my husband. I mean he sent my husband towards my direction."

A woman from El Salvador explained God was with them during their immigration interview. She stated, "All I can say was that God was with us that day." One woman believed God helped her a great deal explaining, "*Si y gracias a Dios me ha ayudo mucho.*" (And thanks to God he has helped us a lot.) One of the interviewees surmised God had brought her to the interview saying, "I was excited when I came over here because first time switching neighborhoods. I said, God you bring me over here."

Church was also a place Latinas trusted. One of the interviewees who worked on behalf of new immigrant Latinos said,

> We need to get a hold of all the pastors because they are always trying to draw people to their churches and if someone comes with a problem, who will you trust? If you don't have anyone in town, you will trust the one who owns the church.

An interviewee from Cuba talked about not having the freedom to worship God or believe in the Catholic Church because her country was communist. The woman remembered, "They are telling us all the time that God does not exist. Castro is God." In Des Moines she had the freedom to worship as she wished.

Several people interviewed debated whether or not Hispanics should be going to Mass in Spanish or English. However, Mass was deemed so important that it needed to be understood and several deemed English did not work. A person explained, "I used to go to Masses in English and it wasn't the same. You lose the flavor somehow."

Another individual who was not Catholic chose to go to a predominantly Hispanic Catholic Church because as a Latina she felt accepted. The Honduran explained, "So finally not being Catholic, I ended up going to a Catholic Church because I felt at home."

One interviewee noted that when Anglos go to church with Hispanics, they looked uncomfortable being with so many Latinos. The Latina from Honduras explained, "I saw and this is what ticked me off. This lady before us moving her purse to another side because we are sitting in the same pew. And I am thinking, I'm here for church go to hell." Still another woman believed that the churches with Anglo and Hispanic members were a great place for both to come together. The Latina elucidated, "There's lots of people that go and Anglos and Mexicans that go there and probably have more things to do together inside the church. That way they know Latinos and we know Anglos."

Concurrently, some of the churches that catered to Anglos and Hispanics were having problems because they had separated out Anglos and Hispanics for different issues. One interviewee saw this as wrong and told the priest,

> You all the time say the Anglos and Spanish supposed to be together, was one congregation. Why in certain times Anglos separate? Like when I had the celebration for the sisters. Sister Maria she helped the whole community, but more for the Spanish. The Anglos have one celebration. Spanish have other celebration. I don't like it.

One more interviewee said she went to a church with the Mass in Spanish but that there were too many kids and you could not hear. The young woman from Peru elucidated, "We go to the church because it has Mass in Spanish but now we are gonna switch because they bring too many kids and I can't hear they are always crying."

One individual took issue with other Latinas having blind faith in God. She clarified, "I have so many conflicts with their system and their religion and you know because they think God will help them and everything."

For a couple of individuals, it was a crisis that brought them to religion. In one case it was a woman's border experience. Prior to crossing the border she had had a woman recite the Bible and it gave her comfort. The Latina related,

> A lady a neighbor, I never talk to her but I remember the night before I leave my country. She go with a scripture from the Bible. It was Joshua Chapter One, verse

> eight and nine. And God say, "Don't be afraid because I am with you wherever you go." And I remember and she gave me Psalm Twenty-Three. And before I never hear nothing about the Bible. My family's Catholic but I never go to the church the Catholic Church. So at this time the lady she touched my heart.

The Latina remembered what she thought at the time, "I was scared and I say, 'Only God can hurt me.' And I remember these words. Don't be afraid because I am with you wherever you may go." The Latina made a commitment to God saying, "Lord if I cross this border, I wanna serve you." Today she and her husband have started a Bible church for Latinos. This same Latina used prayer to guide her and her family. She and her family prayed for a month to help them decide to move to Des Moines and she stated, "If God really wants we move here because we don't go because they were rich people or because they want to give us a house. We believe God can bless us wherever."

One Latina who was angry about her life in the United States felt comfort from her religion saying,

> Because I believe in God very, very much and if I believe in God I know I am a child of God and because of that I am valuable no matter what. No matter my nationality, my ethnicity, my culture, my color of skin, the language I speak. I am a valuable person and God gave me that life. It wasn't the United States government.

A young El Salvadoran related an experience about religion when she first came to the United States saying,

> When I was in my culture I was from a different kind of church and this Catholic lady kept telling me this church is not good. That's the only church I know; that's where I went, and she kept bugging me this church that church.

Summary. The majority of the interviewees were from Catholic backgrounds but not all. Some were Protestant and Pentecostal. Also a percentage of the women interviewed had left the Catholic Church, although religion and faith in God remained strong. Religion, regardless of church denomination, was deemed an important issue for the respondents. The religious beliefs of the interviewees seemed to provide them support and comfort. The Latinas also had a strong sense of responsibility with respect to participation in a church.

What the interviewees did not discuss was whether or not the church provided them with any assistance in getting settled in their new country. No respondent talked about going to an English class or getting help with immigration at their church. The Latinas may have volunteered to help others but no one mentioned they received any assistance from the church they attended.

What Health Insurance?

Medical care was a dilemma for immigrants. Finding a medical professional who could understand Spanish or had convenient office hours so the respondents didn't have to take time off from work posed a challenge. Those Hispanics without documentation needed to be resourceful when finding help with medical treatment. Often they did not have insurance or any kind of federal aid.

An issue for Latinos finding jobs was trying to find ones that would provide medical insurance. Many of the Latinas did not have access to medical insurance and had to pay out of pocket for any medical expenses.

A young undocumented woman from El Salvador clarified,

> I am scared to go the clinic. I was worried when I was pregnant because what am I going to do. Where am I gonna go? Whether they accept me at the hospital and help me over having the baby?

A woman from Guatemala expounded, "They were worried they don't go to the hospital because they don't have insurance." A Latina became upset over the issue of jobs and insurance,

> At least they should have medical insurance if they are working here. Everyone has that right. But people who are here were putting up with living in old apartments and not having good jobs because they do not have documents.

Another issue with health care was having translators. Often hospitals and medical offices did not provide translators for Latino patients. A Mexican mother stated, "I think a lot of medical centers do not have Spanish speaking people in hospitals and medical offices." A Cuban stated, "They will have to take somebody to the doctor with them so they have somebody who can translate for them. Cause if the doctor does not know what they are saying, how can they help?" An example of this was when someone went to a free clinic for a Tuberculosis screening and the test came back positive. What would the follow-up be? If the person did not speak English or was undocumented, he/she needed support to get to a hospital for treatment; furthermore there would not be any follow-up to determine if that person received treatment.

Some of the respondents needed to have someone who could walk them through the paperwork if they were using welfare or some other assistance. A woman talked about getting help from a clinic saying, "The woman (at a clinic) helped us a lot. Like for example with the papers. I don't know where to send. She helped at the clinic."

Some of Latinas helped others with such questions as, how does one get a child into school, determining if the child needed a dentist, vaccinations, and general medical check ups? Or how to keep a job if the employee required tuberculosis screening and the Latino didn't know where to go? A woman from Mexico explained, "I am taking them to get their immunizations and physicals and getting the documents needed." Finding a doctor to perform an immigration medical screening was a contentious issue for a young Mexican, "When I was fighting immigration you have to have a medical exam and you can go to just one doctor in Des Moines."

Understanding workers' compensation, that you could only use an approved company doctor, was often not explained to immigrants. How to apply for workers' compensation was either a confusing procedure for Latino or a benefit that many knew little or nothing about.

> They go to work that have a lot of accidents like meat packing and all that. You cannot go to your own doctor. I know the company doctor may not be as fair but you have to go to the company doctor. You have to fight workman compensation. How do you do it?

Much of the Latino community did not understand how workers' compensation operated or how to use it. They often simply do not know their rights, as a Latina from Mexico surmised,

> They have rights or can get assistance if they were injured at work. They also do not know that they may be giving another type of job at their place of employment that would allow them to mend and still work getting a paycheck.

Family planning education was also an issue for a young Mexican who observed that there needed to be an outreach program for family planning in the Hispanic community. The Latina wanted Latinas to know about birth control pills and how to use them. The interviewees sensed that living in the United States provided more opportunity for birth control if Latinas received information on how to use it. The respondent stated,

> It was really hard for us to have choice for birth control. That's something that is very hard for us to understand here. I have seen so many women who get pregnant time and time again because they don't know and they don't have the money. There should be a Planned Parenthood or an outreach for family planning. To teach them they have a choice not to have children. But the guy will have a problem with this. He will feel you are taking my power away to have children.

Yet another Latina said she was happy here because she could get medical care and help for her young children and self, "If you're sick, it doesn't matter whether you have money or not, they'll treat you. But there if you don't have money you can't get treated."

Even one Latina who was planning on leaving Des Moines to go to Mexico planned to leave after her baby was born because medical care was better for her here. The woman explained, "I had plans to go back in December but I had a problem with my pregnancy. I had an abnormal ultrasound and I ended up staying. My plans got ruined."

A few of the Latinas interviewed found informal networking that assisted them in getting the medical care they needed. A young Latina told how she found a clinic. "I met this lady and I told her I was pregnant and didn't know where to go, and she said, 'Well there is this clinic.' And then she took me there. That's how I got there." One person asks another and they were directed to a clinic that could help them. The most frequent reason that Latinas sought medical care was because of pregnancy.

Summary. Finding medical care and learning how to use the American system with respect to health insurance issues was a problem for the Latinas and their families. There were a few free clinics available for Latinas to use but they didn't offer hospital care and didn't follow up if something was seriously wrong with the Hispanic patient. For the Latinas who did not have any health insurance, which was true of many of the respondents, the problem was continuation of medical services. The clinics that some of the women went to did not always have a translator available to help with language and sometimes a patient could not be understood. Interviewees who had jobs with corporations and were provided health insurance had concerns for the Latino population because so many did not have access to medical treatment. Family planning came up a few times in the interviews but with poor access to medical care and coupled with cultural attitudes it was difficult to find.

Como es la Vida, Asi es la Muerte (As there is life, so is there death)

Death was also a topic with several Latinas on various occasions during the interviews. Death was viewed as a part of life and because a loved one died, did not mean they had left the family. Death was viewed as an extension of that person's life and Latinas felt they were always connected to them. A Hispanic offered an explanation of how Latinas viewed death saying,

> Our whole emotion, our culture about death is just different from the Anglo Saxon culture, just like it would be from the Oriental. We have *Dia de los Muertos* (day of the dead). We believe so much that they're with us always and it was really tough to let them go.

A woman had an altar in her home, in part, to worship the dead. "It's about *la familia* and it's about having things that belong to my mother who died, on the altar."

The interviewees would generally mention the death of most relatives but if their mother had died, they would go into detail. A Mexican who had lost her father related, "It was very difficult because my father died." A respondent whose Mother died stated,

> I have had a hard time dealing with my mother and grandmother being gone. They died within two months of each other. I was depressed and it took a year. My Mother died three years ago and it changed a lot of my perspective on things. My mother died at the age of 63.

The interviewees also talked about not being able to see their respective mothers before they died. A Mexican related the story of saying good-bye to her mother at the airport as she was leaving to move to United States. Her Mother said that this was the last time they would see each other. She said her mother told her,

> "Don't say that. This is not going to happen. I will come back to visit you and you will see me, and she said, "No, I know this was the last time we will see each other." And we hug. Indeed it was the last time I saw her.

Another Latina did not go back and see her mother before her death in Central America because she deemed it had been unsafe to travel back to a war-torn country. She related, "My mother-in-law would always talk me out of going because it was dangerous. So I guess I was still waiting for things to get better and it never did and she died, and I never went to see her."

Two Latinas discussed that their mothers wanted to be buried in their native country. A respondent talked about her Nicaraguan mother's death while in exile in Costa Rica. The Latina had her body exhumed and moved back to Nicaragua. "I went to get my Mother exhumed in Costa Rica and take her back to Nicaragua." A woman from Mexico exclaimed, "My mother wants to be buried in Mexico when she dies."

Unfortunately, two of the Latinas had lost sons. A South American stated, "I had a son die when he was two year old, and I freak out; I lost my mind, my heart." The other, a Cuban, only briefly mentioned the death of her son, "He died of diabetes."

Summary. Latinas viewed death as a part of life. Loved ones who had died continued to be a part of the family. Several respondents had lost their mothers, which was difficult for them. One interviewee went to another country and retrieved her mother's body in order to bring it back and bury her in her home country. Some Hispanics offered one day a year as a holiday to visit the dead and to celebrate with them.

Freedom

Access to a car was freedom. The ability to drive a car gave Latinas more opportunity to interact with each other and the rest of the Des Moines community. Driving offered a chance to find a job or even go shopping without a husband or anyone else. Driving a car helped to abate the feelings of isolation and confinement. Nevertheless, in order to drive a car a Latina had to acquire the necessary skills, such as knowing the laws of the United States, the ability to speak some English, possess documentation, and afford insurance and a car.

Some Latinas did not have access to a car because the family could only afford one and the husband drove it. However, it was actually, more affordable to own a car in the United States than in their former countries.

Driving was an important part of living in the United States and as one Latina mentioned, "I need to have the driver's license. That makes me a person." A Nicaraguan countered,

> My mother, great driver, my twin a great driver. Everyone in our family said you have to drive, but I had a boyfriend since I was real young. So someone drove me around all the time, a sibling or my boyfriend. You know so I never had to; it's not part of my culture really, not to know how to drive. I was just scared. So I guess you know there were a lot of Latinas that don't drive and I was one of them.

Many of the interviewees learned to drive after they got to the United States. A few learned after they came to Des Moines and yet others did not drive. A woman from Peru explained,

> I never got a driver's license in Peru because you have to be 18 and I was 18 here. So my first driver's license I got in Iowa. Every time I would go home I would take an international driver's license.

One Latina from South America said, "I drive my first car in New York City." When one Latina was asked if she drove she said,

> No, it's a crime for me. I can drive on the street, but I get scared on the avenue. The stoplights I get worried that something's gonna happen to the baby. I can't overcome that fear of driving. I was going to take classes, but I got pregnant again and I wasn't able to take the classes.

Some of the interviewees were forced to learn to drive in Des Moines because there was so little mass transportation. A Central American stated, "Transportation was different. There's hardly any public transportation so if I don't have a car I'm out of luck."

Several of the mothers of the interviewees never learned to drive a car. A Mexican stated, "My mother never learned. I have always. All but one of my sisters does and she was married to a Mexican." A woman from Cuba stated, "My mother never drove." A woman from Central America stated, "My mother never drove; she has a chauffeur." Several Latinas had mothers, sisters, and aunts who did not drive for several of the following reasons: not owning a car, the dangers of driving in their country (in Argentina it was the leading cause of death), readily available mass transportation, a house full of people to drive, the fear, Latino husband who would not allow it, not being able to read or write in Spanish or English, having a driver or chauffeur for the family, or someone else who did all the shopping.

A Mexican talked about her mother, who lived in Des Moines, finally bought her first car. "She just purchased her first car. I mean, she'll ride the bus if it's kind of snowy or what have you but she has her brand new car and she's doing really good." And the mother of a Central American was forced to drive because her mother, the interviewee's grandmother, did not. "My mother had to learn how to drive to bring my grandmother where she needed to go. They weren't expected to work so now she had a function and they were mobile. My mom learned by taking classes in Guatemala."

It was because of their mothers that some Latinas learned to drive. A Latina from Peru learned because her mother insisted, even though the family had a driver. The Latina related her learning experience,

> I have an Aunt back in Peru. Her husband didn't want her to drive and she never did. But my Mom was liberal and when I was turning 17, she paid classes for me to learn

> how to drive. My dad did not care. He had a driver, so the driver would take me everywhere so I didn't need to learn. But my mom said, "You need to learn how to drive." It was funny. One day we were in California on the freeway. We were both shocked. My mom said, "Remember that day that I told you I wanted you to learn how to drive? And look at you five lanes here." I learned because of her.

Another Latina had finally learned from her mother, her father had tried to teach her when she was very little. The Latina stated, "He'd do the pedals and I'd do the other. Then my mom sent me to driving school before she sent me to the United States."

Other Latinas learned because their husbands helped or taught them. They stated that their husbands perceived their wives needed to be able to get around and they would not always be available. An interviewee explained,

> I learned to drive here. My husband basically taught me. I didn't know anything and I need to ask for a ride to go everywhere. So he told me "Look. You have to learn to drive because you cannot depend on me. I'm not going to be able to do it so get in the car, start the car and I will tell you." And he told me what to do right here around the blocks. I was shaking and I was suffering. But I said, " God please help me how to do it." And he helped. I got my driver's license yesterday.

A Latina from Mexico wanted to be able to leave the house so much that she watched as her husband drove and figured out how to drive their stick shift car on her own. The Mexican clarified,

> Just watching him drive and then he said, 'You really want to drive?' I really wanted to get out of the house. I used to drive once in awhile with my Dad but he was always getting a new car. It was hard for my husband. I would have to wait for him to come home off work and take me to the grocery store. He helped me learn and then he realized I was not at home and he wondered why he gave me the keys. I am never home.

A couple of Latinas talked about how much they had fought with their husbands when they were teaching them to drive. A Mexican woman explained,

> I had taken some classes in Mexico with my ex-husband. But we would fight all the time so I would not drive in Mexico. But as I moved to another job there I needed to

> drive to do some things for my boss and he would let me use his car. You know my ex-husband did not know that I could drive.

A woman from El Salvador how she learned to drive explained,

> When I came here I did not drive because I never had a car at home. But when my husband and I were dating and he say, "You gotta learn to drive." And he would teach me. And by the time we got here it was just very difficult cause then I got a job and he had to take me and pick me up and then he would try to teach me and he would get on my nerves and yell at me. "You're doing this wrong that wrong." I said, that's it. Fine. So when he was sleeping, I would put the baby in the car and go around the block, and we had a stick shift. Finally I said, "I am ready." And he was bummed because he took the driving test at the same time and I passed and he didn't.

Another woman drove in Mexico from the time she was a child, but her husband would not let her drive after they were married and living in Des Moines. The interviewee explained,

> I was driving since I was 11 years old in Mexico. And when I came here my husband told me, "You can't drive here cause you don't have a driver's license they will take you straight to jail and you will never see your kids." He scared me. When I needed milk or Pampers, he was sometimes drunk. I have my kids so I start driving. I can't go and get my license, I cannot speak English. Finally a friend helped me, and one time I was driving without my license and getting my husband and I was late and he was going to be very mad. I drove over a fire hose. And the police were very mad. He said, "Stop here." And I don't have my driver's license and I am not legal. This was over. And I don't understand nothing. The police see I have sleeping children and it was very cold. He said, "Where were you going?" And I tell him I am going to pick up my husband at work. He let me go. I was very lucky. Later I get my license.

For another Latina it was her Anglo mother-in-law that got her to drive.

> I was scared to death and my mother-in-law forced me to do it because either my husband or her would have to take me to my appointments and this and that, and she hired a private person and I learned how to. And I remember telling her when I die when I get into a crash and die feel guilty because it's your fault. And she said, 'Latina, when you're enjoying your freedom and independence then think of me because I am responsible.'

Not knowing how to speak English or not understanding slang was an issue for several couple of Latinas when they went to get their driver's license. A Nicaraguan commented, "I was taking the test and the inspector said, 'If you get bumped from the rear.'

That was a word I had never heard. I'm like, what was the rear? Where did I just get bumped? I had no idea." A Mexican Latina said,

> I did my driver's license in English when I didn't know English. Oh my God how hard it was for me to do the test. It was just horrendous I would be shaking and I would be afraid and it was awful and then I could not understand the directions I mean even though I could read it and use the dictionary to look up words and so forth. But when the police officer would give me directions to do the driving test I wouldn't know what she meant so I didn't pass.

Many of the Latinas sensed that there was a need to have Spanish speaking translators at the Department of Transportation to help them through the process of getting their driver's license. Having a volunteer or aid that could relate to Latinas would be a great asset. One Latina wished for, "Bilingual volunteers at the Department of Transportation to help those individuals who might have questions when getting their driver's license."

Another Latina who was documented said it took a year for her to get a driver's license from the Department of Transportation. The Latina relates, "We went to take our driver's license. It took us a year. Everything was wrong. This was wrong, that was wrong. No, you don't need this, whatever."

For the undocumented Latina, a driver's license was something they could only dream about. Without a Social Security Number, a driver's license was unattainable in the State of Iowa. A young woman explained, "I don't have a license, I don't have any documents." Though Latinas may not have documents, they still needed to be able to drive to work or buy groceries. Undocumented individuals often drove but did not get a driver's license, learn about the traffic laws, and drove without car insurance.

Getting to know the driving laws of the United States was a topic many of the Latinas talked about. Latinas discussed the fact that in their countries there were no speed limits, no one stops at stop signs, no one had insurance, and that here you had to get used to the laws.

One respondent said, "Here (in Iowa) it was not a game. You will get in trouble by not following the traffic laws." Some Latinas mentioned being pulled over for rolling through a stop sign. A Nicaraguan told why she did not pass the driver's test.

> Over there you think, oh well. Nobody's coming; you just kinda yield and turn around and keep going. Actually the first time I went for my driver's license, that's why they did not give it too me. I had to take it twice. I got to the stop sign. I just rolled over to it and kept going. The policeman say, 'It said stop.'

There was a desire for individuals to comply with the laws of the United States, and they believed they needed to do so. One Latina stated, "Hispanics really want to follow the rules but needed help to find out what and how to do so." Another Latina suggested that Hispanics,

> Must be taught the laws. You must have a driver's license. They must have compliance of driving laws. You do not drink and drive here in the United States. Not only was it dangerous but the U.S. will enforce laws with more penalties and you go to jail. You don't get pulled over because you were Mexican, you get pulled over because you did not stop at the stop sign."

The lack of car insurance and the perceived need for it was also an issue. Several interviewees did not see the need to spend money on car insurance.

A Latina from Central America told how her father sent her picture in and she was sent a driver's license.

A Latina reported that the men in her country all learned to drive saying, "Guys learned to drive because if they're poor they could be chauffeurs. They could be taxi drivers you know bus drivers; whatever, so they learn to drive. If not they're farmers and they work in the fields."

A suggestion made by interviewees was to have a place that Latinas could go in order, to learn to drive. A woman from Central America said, "A great service is to have a place where Latinas could learn to drive without stress, in Spanish."

A few of the Latinas were uncomfortable driving in the winter and could not get used to ice and snow. A Mexican confessed, "If it's icy or they have had snow or it was snowy, I'm taking the bus or I'll get a ride."

Summary. Learning to drive was important for Latinas in order to adapt to life in Des Moines because there was very little public transportation for them to use here. The interviewees needed to be able to drive to get from one place or another, take kids to school, shop, go to work, or other necessities. If they didn't have a car or were not able to drive, the Latina needed very good friends and family members with cars who were willing to transport them. Life without a car in Des Moines, the Latinas found, was difficult and confining. The respondents added that driving a car in the United States also brought responsibilities with respect to obeying traffic laws and buying car insurance, and this was not the case in their former countries. The Latinas found that in order to get a driver's license in the United States they must have proper documents and a command of English.

Not Your Bodegas

For Latinas, shopping for clothes in Des Moines was no different than shopping for anyone else. Shopping for groceries, however, was a bit more complicated. Where Latinas shopped for groceries was complicated for several reasons. Such issues as the food cost, proximity of stores to their home, ease of finding items, and the freshness of foods were concerns for the Latinas. Latinas would often shop for canned goods at one store, meat at another, and tortillas and produce at yet another. An interviewee stated, "Produce was better at one store but the meat was the pits." Another individual claimed, "For canned goods I go to one store because they are cheaper but for meat another." A Central American said, "We have a Mexican store close by but they don't have many things and when I wanna make like *bisteak*, I have to go to another." A Mexican explained that she shopped for fruit at one store, meat and laundry soap at another, and went to the Mexican store for tortillas.

A difference in shopping routines for some Latinas and non-Latinos was that Latinas shopped everyday so that the foods they bought were fresher. A Mexican offered, "Most of the people are used to buying food everyday and they go so it was fresher. But here we go every week because of transportation."

The Latinas stated that they went to various Mexican stores in order to find items to make traditional foods. One Latina noted, "I try sometimes to make food like real traditional meals if I can find all the ingredients. Basically you can find a lot of things here." The interviewees favored one Mexican store in particular, as it seemed to have the best selection, and it was noted to be cleaner than others. A Latina mentioned, "There was one I really like to go to; it's clean. They have basically everything of what I need. It has space to work through and the other stores don't." A Latina noted that various things were cheaper and fresher at the Mexican stores saying, "You can get way less expensive avocados at the Mexican store than you can at other stores, and papayas and mangoes and better ones. You can't even get papayas at the regular stores." Yet another mentioned that some items like canned goods were more expensive at the Mexican stores. A different person explained how she felt about the Mexican stores, "It helps Des Moines to become more diverse."

The Latinas essentially used several non-Latino grocery stores; 8 used one store, 9 another, 3 another, and 4 yet another. One Latina noted she liked one store but her Anglo husband did all the shopping and went to another one. The Mexican said, "I like this store but my husband like the other and do the grocery shopping so I do not argue." One older Latina related that she shopped at the store by her house because, "It's close to the house and I like everybody there and I liked it."

A Cuban clarified the difference in grocery shopping between her country and Des Moines stating, "We did not have supermarkets until maybe the last year I lived there but little stores called *bodegas* which are located in the neighborhood. The maid would order whatever she needed for the day and they would deliver it to the house. So I never went shopping in Cuba." This Latina's first grocery shopping came when she arrived in Miami.

Another Latina surmised that Hispanic woman wanted to go where they felt comfortable to shop. The Latina explained,

> They want all the practical stuff and you know they want to ask questions in Spanish. So if they go somewhere else they have to bring a friend that understands a little more or they can't ask questions. People need to go where they are comfortable.

Another interviewee reported, "Latinas shop in the Latino stores because they can relate to the person there. Latinas fear that if they couldn't ask how to cook a food item, how can it be prepared? So you go where your comfort level was." An additional Latina explained the need to shop where she felt respected and wanted stating,

> We have high purchasing power, Hispanics do, but you know what? I say we're going to build an association where we're going to shop, where businesses are friendly to Hispanics or choose not to shop here. And I, and I know I'm a little more, I don't want to say aggressive because I just think I respond, to other people's actions, and that I don't want accuse them. But I shop a lot at the Mexican stores.

Where and how Latinas purchased clothes brought different responses. Many of the Latinas interviewed shopped at various stores at a "mall." Several mentioned they shopped at the West side mall in particular, while others did not mention a specific mall. One Latina thought that most of the Hispanics went to a certain mall to shop saying, "You see more of the Hispanic people that have a preference to a specific shopping area in Des Moines."

Though none of the Latinas from this interview group specifically said they shopped at the mall they said Latinas shopped at. One Hispanic said, "I try to go to Chicago and shop."

One Latina recorded the fact she did not like to shop because as a child, she and her siblings had to go shopping every Saturday with their Mother from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The interviewee described, "My mother did not drive so my father would drop us off and pick us up. We hated it, so I don't care to spend a weekend shopping. For me shopping was go buy what you need."

A young woman surmised, "I'm not much of a shopper but if I buy, I go to the mall and I don't waste time going to different places." A South American mentioned, "I can't afford to buy clothes yet. I make so little money that I can't afford to by anything. All my clothes were old." Another Hispanic voiced, "Where I shop depends what I'm buying or what everybody else was buying."

A Hispanic shared her story of having to buy a winter coat for the first time in her life because was coming to live in a cold place. She said, "I went shopping for clothes. I bought a coat so I could come to Iowa."

There were two favorite shops at the mall mentioned by several of the respondents. A few said they would not shop at one store because the service was bad or the staff rude. A woman from Nicaragua claimed,

> I used to shop at the store. I quit going because the service was lousy. One of the things that I will not tolerate from anybody is being discourteous. Rudeness is just beyond my comprehension. You can be in a hurry you can be in a bad mood but, by golly, you better be courteous at all times.

A few of the Latinas explained when shopping they were made to feel badly because they spoke Spanish. A Mexican discussed,

> If you go to a store and don't find what you want, how can you ask for it? You always have to ask somebody to do you the favor of going with you. Once I went to the store by myself. When I first got there the lady spoke to me. I didn't understand her and told her I only spoke Spanish and she threw up her hands. I felt bad about this.

For another Latina the check-out counter was an unpleasant experience. The Latina explained, "One time at the store I was buying things and a cashier shoved the money at me when she saw I could not speak English." A Mexican related her story of poor treatment saying,

> We went to a store after Thanksgiving and I say to the lady, " I just need to know how much this dress cost. You say you have 65% there and plus if you buy it with a credit card. Just tell me how much I have to pay that way I can see how many I can take." She said, "Well can't you wait?" And I say, "Yes I can.go, ahead and finish with the guy and I will wait." Then she started doing other things. I'm asking, "you please can you tell me how much the dress cost." "Well I don't have time." And I said, "I don't care I've been here that's your job if you don't like it quit and do something else. But I am gonna pay for this dress. And I want you to tell me how much it is. I have been here." I said, "I need to talk to your manager." "You just go ahead and talk to my manager." I say, "you don't talk to me like that because I am not stealing anything, I am going to buy and I am going to pay for it." I got that from my husband. I don't know why. Probably because a lot of people have the idea that they were being rejected and they were, but a lot of times people were mean.

A Central American woman talked about a shopping experience where she had been unfairly accused of stealing. The respondent explained, "They said I had more than one piece and that the one piece was missing so I dropped everything. I left and called the manager the next day." Another time the Latina had money stolen out of her purse and no one would help her. In fact, the store employee told her she was creating a problem and called the police to arrest her. The Hispanic expounded,

> I left my purse in the dressing room, I was stressed. I had $320 in my purse. I get a call from the customer service saying, "Your purse is here." I told her, "the money is not there." So I started asking her, "who went into the dressing rooms. Do you have videos that you can rewind so at least we can get a description and call the cops to come over here?" "No, no we just made a report." I was upset. "So no customers went into the dressing room, so one of your employees took my money." They call

> the cops and they came. They talk to the store and then they tell me to leave. And I said, "why I didn't do anything wrong." And they said, "You have to leave." "I didn't do anything wrong." And so without telling me they arrested me. They arrested me in front of my children. I reached out to my children. They smacked me against the wall and gave me black eye. They're on top of me and put mace in front of my face. They incarcerated me for criminal trespassing and resisting arrest.

The Latina observed that the local grocery stores should also be more Spanish friendly and develop a comfort level for the Hispanic shopper. A Latina from Nicaragua said, "Latinas want to shop where they feel wanted and comfortable."

Summary. The Latinas talked about how they were treated by employees at stores and deemed stores wanting to increase their volume of sales would be wise to offer diversity training for sales staff and cashiers. The Latinas bought clothes, shoes, food, and many other products, but they shopped most frequently where they felt comfortable and welcomed. The Latinas were frustrated with some of the attitudes of clerks and wanted to let them know that just because a person did not speak English or speaks with an accent did not mean he/she could not afford to shop and buy. Latinas also liked to be able to buy goods that were familiar to Hispanics so they believed it would be in the best interest of stores to find out what Latinas like to purchase and make an effort to stock those items.

The interviewees were like anyone else who goes shopping. They expected to be able to find what they wanted and to get service while they were buying. The Latinas did not favor one particular store or chain over another they bought eclectically.

Drugs, Gangs and Deportations

The topic of illegal drug use by Latinos was brought up several times during the interview process. Often mentioned were drug trafficking and the illegal drug use of young, non-employed Latinos. Interviewees worried that the young Latino who was not going to school, and who could not find his/her place in the Des Moines, was turning to drugs as a way to make money or escape. A Cuban stated,

> Help them to take out drugs. Help them to get into a program. You know because sometime the only thing they can do for money is to get into the drugs. Teach them all of these things. Give them advice. Get all the grown ups together."

An El Salvadoran questioned, "Why are there so many drugs in the Latino community? Because they cannot advance. They wanna have as much as everybody, but they are afraid so for them it is much easier to say they're gonna sell drugs." A Latina said,

> When people live on the margins of society, that's what breeds gangs that breed discontent that breeds people not caring, and someone steals from someone else and someone sells drugs for somebody else. If the people are made to feel a part of this community.

Another Latina talked about the lack of things to do in Des Moines that were geared toward Latinos and said, "Because what do you do if you don't like bowling you don't even know what that is? What do you do? Do you go out to the streets and what is on the streets. Problems, drugs, alcohol."

A few of the Latinas felt Latino drug users should be deported with one saying, "If you use drugs go back to your country." Another Latina put it this way,

> There are some bad seeds no matter where you go, and they should be deported. I think everybody that comes in with drugs should be deported. If they don't know how to behave don't give my name a bad name to the Latinos.

Latinas discussed drug and alcohol dependent relatives. A young woman talked about her brother saying, "You know one of my brothers he got into drugs really bad, because, I think. my mom and dad would work all the time, come home drunk and fight." A Latina talked about her husband's drinking problem, "Things were really bad in my marriage with drinking and while he drank." Another Mexican related, "But my husband's uncle is terrible. He is drunk all the time and beat his wife." A Central American brought up her past life in saying, "I lived with him for seven years. He was a drug addict."

The other side of the drug issue was that Des Moines was seen as a safer environment for children than other larger cities in the United States. A Mexican mother said, "There is no way I'm going to expose my children to a big city in the United States. I don't want them exposed to drugs, violence, and gangs." A mother from Mexico surmised her children were safer in the United States saying, "And there are children in the streets there using inhalants and sometimes they're two and three, four and five years old."

A Latina assumed that Anglos look at all Latinos coming to Des Moines as drug dealers. The woman felt, "I know that we are perceived by a lot of the people that we are negative. We are seen as drug dealers because we are here. And they don't know us."

However, a young Mexican who was from Mexico had a difficult time relating to her American peers. The Latina said, "I think it is tough to have American friends because they like to drink; they're always using pot. They're thinking of sex and they don't know how to have fun."

Summary. Illegal drug use was an issue for the Latinas who considered their children at a higher risk than most. The fact that their children were living between two cultures and trying to find a place to fit in worried many of these mothers. The respondents talked about the large number of Hispanic families with both parents working and no one at home with the children. The interviewees added that there were Latinos who did not value education and did not monitor their children's school attendance, leaving them, they believed, as targets for drug dealers. At the time of the interviews, there were very few places where Latino children could go and be as they felt free to be. There was no teen center or drop in place for Hispanic youth and there were few role models or programs for them. Gangs and drugs, the interviewees suspected, were being targeted toward Latino youth and this fact was of great concern to the Latinas.

The Latinas' children were at risk for illegal drugs as well as any Hispanic who was not employed or under employed. Again, there was no community center or place for Latinos to go and get support. No one place accommodated the issues that Latinos faced. No programs were available to help them help themselves. The Latinas concluded that those Latinos who were poorly treated and made little money used drugs to escape.

Chapter 7

FINDINGS: SPOUSE, BOYFRIEND, FAMILY

Marriage and family were pivotal components that both propelled and constrained the lives of Latinas and were compounded because of the Latina's need to balance two cultures.

Latinas Marry Forever, My Divorce was Unusual.

Latinas were expected to marry. Latinas believed that to have a complete life they would have a partner and raise children. All of the interviewees had a male companion but not always a good one. The respondents discussed marriage and family as an important part of their lives and culture. The Latinas observed that there were differences between Hispanics and Anglos with respect to marriage and family.

The makeup of family and partners of the interviewees was the following respectively: 16 were married, 1 was widowed, and 5 were divorced with 3 of those remarried. Two Hispanics were single but both had boyfriends. Seven women had divorced parents and 2 had divorces in their families--one had a divorced sister and the other's mother had been divorced before she met the Latina's father. Three respondents had not known both parents. One Latina's mother died when she was seven months old and never met her father. Another woman's mother had not married her father, and a third woman's parents died when she was young. Two of the Latinas had children prior to marriage and one of those Latinas was married at the time of the interview.

Of the Latinas who had been married, 14 had Latino spouses, 7 had married Anglos, and 1 was married to an African American. The boyfriends of the 2 single Latinas were

Anglo and African American respectively. Boyfriends of the divorced Hispanics were Latino. The two remarried interviewees had an Anglo and Latino husband respectively. All but 3 of the Latinas had children.

The interviewees had multiple issues when talking about marriage and one of the most popular topic was that of *machismo*, the concept of a patriarchal family and marriage where the man was head of the house with full control. A respondent from Mexico explained how she viewed the *machismo*, "It's hard to give my husband whatever he wants, cause I know he can do it himself. Like my Dad he will come here; it's like he has a glass of wine but wants you to get (him) a glass of water and he's sitting there. And then his slippers." A Latina from Central America talked about her attraction to Hispanic men and the problem with *machismo* saying,

> There's something about Hispanic men, and I guess it is the fact that I think we can speak in Spanish. I tend for those people that, you know, meet my father, country, and music. But it is very common for a lot of Hispanic women now that have awakened and are bilingual say, "hey. I don't have to take that crap. You know *machismo*?" Your self-esteem is trashed by a partner who is not supportive of what you do, and I'd rather be alone than not have a partner who supports me in what I to do.

A couple of Latinas depicted their relationship or their parents' relationships, in the context of the *machismo* male and how it affected themselves and their mothers. A Latina from Cuba stated,

> Nights was supposed to be with him. Women don't go out. A lady don't go out to a bar. He never thought it was for me to go to a bar. He never went to a bar with me.

A Latina from Central America discussed a Mary and Eve concept explaining, "Latinos want their woman bipolar. They want to marry someone like Mary but crave someone like Eve." A woman from Mexico related,

> And my mother, I remember, what she told me. I must always go and do what my husband wants. I no can do what I want. I do not belong to my family but to my husband. My husband needs me and I need to follow him wherever he goes.

A young Latina from Mexico married to a Mexican stated, "Marriage is difficult because men have the first and last word and we have to do what they say. We can't do what we want. If they say we can't work then we don't work."

Another way of being *machismo* was the acceptance within the Hispanic culture of the right of Latinos to have mistresses. A South American who came from unmarried parents explained, "My father was 95 but I never lived with him. He was married when he had something with my mother. He was married to another family." A Mexican Latina stayed married to a Latino husband until her mother died because the mother had told her, "No one in my family is or will get divorced." The woman finally divorced her husband after she discovered he had married a second wife during their marriage. The Latina explained,

> We were in the embassy getting papers. There was woman judge and asked him to tell only the truth. So she asked him, "In your entire life did you marry only one Mrs.?" And he said, "Yes." And she said, "Liar, because you married another woman in this year, in this town, in this time."

At the time of the interview, the Latina quoted above was currently married to an Anglo who was very supportive of her. She stated, "He's very nice, very nice guy. And he believes in everything and me. He help me with business."

A Mexican American, who came from divorced Latino parents and was divorced from her Latino husband explained,

> I had always thought that I wanted to be married to a Latino, and we couldn't have been pulled more apart. It was cultural. I hated the *machismo*. I hated it. It was just the most destructive thing in the world. Even if you're raised with it, there isn't a woman I know who did not hate it. We were separated for 10 years. I couldn't even get a divorce. I didn't know how to get a divorce. I could not accept that I had been a failure. I thought that I was a failure at being a family maker. Finally, after the divorce I felt liberated.

Another Mexican talked about her second husband who was Anglo. "I just thought Anglo men were just a little bit more easy going. I did not like *machismo.* Was I wrong." This Latina also had divorced parents.

Latinas who had divorced saw themselves as unique. The respondents also surmised that divorce was more rare and painful for a Hispanic than an Anglo because it was not accepted in their culture or families. One Latina stated, "I have failed as a woman because I got divorced." Many Latinas considered divorce was not an option for Hispanic women. A Mexican related what her mother told her. "In my family there has never been a divorced woman. You marry for the church, and whatever you will stay married."

A Mexican woman discussed her marriage and divorce to an Anglo, voicing that the cultural differences were too vast to deal with, she added, "My father did not like him because he was white or he was an American." The interviewee explained that while growing up, divorce was very taboo citing,

> Being a Latino and being divorced that was something American don't realize how hard it is for us. How painful it is for a woman to be divorced, because it is like you failed as a woman or that is the way you have been educated

Another Latina, the product of in a society that worshipped its mothers, was pulled closer to her father after her parent's divorce. The respondent recalled,

> You know because they got divorced my dad and I were really close but I really felt for my father. You know, I took on a lot of his sorrow and his sadness and it was the dichotomy of my parents. I mean if I was with him I had to, for him to love me.

Another Latina talked about her mother's divorce and remarriage. "For my mom to get married and divorced, this was her second marriage, and be divorced that was very unusual. It was unusual that my mom was divorced and my father was a conservative man." One more interviewee voiced, "My parents got divorced in a time when people did not get divorced."

And a Honduran discussed her parent's divorce explaining, "I had to sort out a lot when my parents divorced. Coming from a predominantly Catholic country and going to a Catholic school where you were taught your parents will always be married in heaven it was difficult to take." The respondent remained close to her dad but married an Anglo saying, "I am not attracted to Latino men."

A Mexican woman who divorced a Latino and then married another considered her marriage stronger because he was Hispanic. The woman's husband had been married three times, twice to Anglos and then to Latina. The interviewee stated, "Marriage values are different for Latinos and marriage is considered forever." Marriage was viewed as differently from the perspective of Anglos and Hispanics. An Ecuadorian interviewee surmised,

> We are not like American people when it comes to marriage. American people they think first. They plan first. Who is this person I'm gonna marry? Is this a bad person? And when they go to have kids what do they do first? Have a house, perhaps a car have everything and then a baby. Doesn't matter how old you are, maybe 35 or something like that.

Another interviewee said, "Latinas on average married way too young, and that is Latino culture."

A Mexican met her Anglo husband in Mexico and then lived in Des Moines. The interviewee did not think that Anglos or Latinas saw marriage too differently but that marriage was probably easier in the United States. The respondent explained that life was changing in Mexico,

> At least in the larger cities of Mexico where life is more progressive. In prior years it was different. I think now because we are so close to the United States we are adopting more of the culture. I think women are more conscious now that getting married is a very important step in their lives. You can see women not getting married so young. Women's roles are changing. Latinas are getting more education and going to work. But people in Mexico are still being raised to believe the man in the house is the one that is the boss.

A Mexican believed a major difference between Latinas and Anglos was that Anglos had independence in relationships. A Latina did not understand or know how to relate to freedom in a relationship. The interviewee rendered,

> If a Latina marries an American, it is like they are partners. He wants you to have a world of your own and you don't know what that means or how to do it. He will allow you freedom. But you don't have any direction or any support. You don't know what that means. It is hard to have freedom in your hands when you don't know what to do with it. You would feel guilty working when perhaps you think you should be home cooking for your spouse.

Another respondent offered how hard it was for a Hispanic woman to understand choices, "A Latina can have choices of what she wants to do and have alternatives but you don't know how to handle it. You feel confused about your role and who you are." An older Mexican married to an Anglo said,

> I was having a little problem when I married my husband. I would not say what I need. It was better the husband say, "Oh you like to have this or this?" My daughter teach me. She told me, "Mother, you have a problem because Americans so different than Spanish." You want the Spanish asking you, "you like this or you wanna go someplace and you answer." "This is what you expect," they ask. The Americans, no, you need to tell him what you want.

A Latina who had been married 20 years to an Anglo talked about how they had blended their lives and made it work. The woman explained that they brought different experiences to their marriage. The interviewee offered,

> When you get to understand, tolerate, accept, and love that person in spite of the differences, it's got to be a lasting bond. You get to know and experience so much more because you have so much more different to offer. You know two Americans or two Latinos marry and they have the same backgrounds and the same beliefs and the same church. But you have someone born in Delaware and someone born in Nicaragua. There are things that flash in my mind and we try them here and he does the same.

A Latino from Mexico, who was the first in her family to marry an Anglo, exclaimed, "I had no attraction to Latino men." The interviewee's family didn't approve of marriage to an Anglo. The first time she brought her husband to meet the family her brother said, "He's white? Where'd you find this gringo?" The Latina offered, "All of my friends had been Caucasian and I wanted to be like them." The interviewee sensed she made a decision to marry an Anglo because he would be more involved in her children's lives and did not want her childhood repeated stating,

> Because my dad was a real heavy drinker, he used to hit my mom. So it was very tough childhood. I think Caucasian people they're very involved with their children. A lot of Mexicans or Hispanics are not because they are so busy working all the time because they have a family to support.

Several Latinas discussed abusive situations within their relationships. A woman from Nicaragua talked about her Anglo husband and their strained marriage. He was verbally abusive and constantly teased her about her accent. The woman observed,

> He's unhappy with himself so you know it's like he enjoys making other people unhappy. When I realized he wouldn't have patience with my English, that was like a slap in the face. Every time I am trying to talk to him I am nervous.

The respondent came from a divorced family and she felt that she viewed marriage as something that could be temporary, explaining, "My mother got divorced when I was young so my view of marriage is that it is not permanent." This Central American had been married over 20 years.

A respondent from Mexico talked about her problem marriage to a Latino who was 19 years older. The Latina described some issues with her ex-husband.

> Twice a month I went to Toastmasters and I loved it. But it was becoming a problem with my ex-husband because he was always jealous, but then he became even more jealous. He would give me a hard time and telling me I didn't care about my children and my family. That I was outside the home instead of being with them and so problems started to escalate.

The Mexican also came from an abusive, divorced family stating, "I did not finish middle school because my parents separated. We had domestic violence of the worst level."

A young El Salvadoran explained the dilemma with the African American father of her child.

> Last year was a bad year. When I first got pregnant it was not good. I don't like what he does. He doesn't work. He expects his mom to do all kinds of stuff. Now that he is a dad he should be more responsible. And I got into an argument and he hit me. I pressed charges. I am not supposed to be with him but I am with him, so I can marry him.

Because the interviewee was undocumented, she had no place to go for support or assistance. The woman's mother died when she was an infant and she never met her father.

A woman talked about her first marriage to a Honduran, for immigration convenience. The marriage and the immigration were both disasters and the marriage ended in annulment. The Latina explained,

> I married someone from my country who was a citizen, for the purpose of getting my documentation, not because I wanted to. We made a deal. I paid for his ticket; he came and we did get married. And I said okay I have a boyfriend you can do whatever you want. We got an annulment.

Unfortunately, her next husband was drug dependent and abusive. The Latina elucidated, "I found out he was doing cocaine once more and I became pregnant again. He refused to take me to get birth control pills and I was afraid of him. I was two and half months pregnant and he gave me one of the biggest beatings ever and I was so scared." This Central American was single and dating a Latino from Puerto Rico.

In Des Moines, as in most of the United States, a woman could get a restraining order and get support if there was domestic abuse. Most Latinas do not know about their rights in a domestic abuse situation or how to get help. As a Mexican related, "They don't have restraining orders in Mexico." If the Latina did not know whom to call for help with domestic abuse she may not get help because culturally it was very hard. Turning to their Latino families was not an option. A Latina observed that the issue of domestic violence within the Hispanic community needed to be addressed but was not because no one knows how. She said, "I participated in public hearings back in 1990 which changed a law. There was concern about going into a Hispanic community and talking about it because they say it was too sensitive an issue. It was a very important issue."

A woman from Central America had a child out of wedlock by a Latino who rejected her. The Latina expressed, "My son's Dad, he never wanted to marry me because he was in college. He told me that he wanted to marry someone better, not a secretary." The interviewee met and married a man from her country. The Latina considered marriage similar for Anglos and Latinas saying, "We are pretty similar, only a little different. I think there is more pressure on Latinas, but the expectations are the same. American women are going to take care of the kids. It is similar."

A Mexican married to a Latino considered her marriage very serious and that she and her husband shared everything saying, "We have ideas that marriage was serious. You have to share everything with your husband, not like when you are on your own." Her parents both died when she was very young and she was raised by her siblings who did not like her husband.

An interviewee from Peru was married to a man whose mother was Anglo and his father was Mexican. She stated,

> He's American and he's Latin. So I think our marriage is more similar to an Anglo marriage than being a Latino. I guess if I was in Peru, I have friends that they stay at home with the kids and they probably do everything from cooking and taking care of everything. We share everything. He cooks, he does the laundry.

A married woman from Mexico who did not speak English and was close to her husband, believed in staying with the Mexican culture as much as she could. Her daughter talked about the husband, "He can be so hard to be with, but he supports, my mom but he does not like her to drive. He can be so typical Mexican."

Moving to a foreign country, as several of the Latinas and their spouses had done, made some of the Latino couples closer. As a woman from Central America attested, "I feel that coming and living in a different country has really made a change in my husband and me. We were more close; we give support to each other."

Interviewees also offered that as Latinos, there were other unusual circumstances within relationships. One Latina offered that Hispanics do not live together before marriage explaining, "For a Hispanic, it was kind of shocking but we lived together for two years." Another respondent added that mixed marriages were considered uncommon in her country and stated, "I married an African American, which was not very common in Hispanics' mix. My mom was not too happy."

Summary. Latinas viewed marriage as a strongly valued within the Hispanic culture and that divorce was a taboo topic. Nevertheless, a high percentage of the Latinas interviewed were divorced or came from divorced families. During the interviews, the respondents who had divorced considered themselves to be unique and unusual because they believed Latinos did not divorce. Many of the interviewees expressed how unusual they thought they were for being involved with divorce because it was so rare for Hispanics.

Another topic within the discussion of marriage was the husband's place in the family. Some of the interviewees, but not all, stated that the husband was considered to be the head of the household, the one who had control and the last word. A few Latinas sensed that the role of the Latino male was changing, but slowly. Though the Latinas stated they did not like the cultural *machismo* attributed to men, they put up with it. Younger interviewees concluded that Latinas were changing, marrying at older ages, getting careers, and waiting to have children, but were still taught that a husband heads the house.

All of the interviewees were involved with a man, either dating or married to, and all wanted to have a male relationship in their life.

Mi Madre, Mi Familia

Family was the cornerstone to Latino culture. Spending time with one's family was seen as desirable. Family was everything, and a part of almost every aspect of a Latinas' life. This view was true for all of the interviewees but one. In fact, at the time of the interview, most of the Latinas had someone they considered family living in Des Moines. Family was a large part of each interviewee's life but for different reasons. One of the primary differences between Anglos and Latinas was the relationship with the family. The bond between family and individuals was considered stronger within Latino families. A young woman from Mexico exclaimed, "My family is first, then anybody." One Latina sensed, "Hispanics are more family-oriented, more human." A Latina from Mexico thought Hispanics try to do more things as a family than Anglos.

Culturally, a Latina's former country fostered the concept of family more than the United States, and much of a Latina's free time was spent with family out of desire, not out of necessity. An American Hispanic felt the connection to family was centuries old saying,

> It goes back hundreds of years to the Aztecs and the Toltecs and the Olmecs and Mayans and *la familia*. It's so strong you cannot get away from it even if you want to.

> I mean who would want to, but sometimes yes people want to be independent. And family doesn't let you become independent.

Still a Latina from South America also found people from the Midwest to be very family oriented saying, "Here in the Midwest, in Iowa, people really like their families. Everything is their family, especially when they are married. Everything's their kids and they stay home and watch movies. And they just do everything together." A Latina from Argentina explained,

I guess American couples want the same for their families. I mean the focus is on your kids and you want to have successful kids when you're seeing the place that you want to live. You want to see the schools are good.

Parental respect was another issue discussed. A respondent from Honduras stated that she believed that Hispanics were more respectful of their parents than Anglos citing,

> In my country we have respect for our parents. We have to respect because our parents are everything. I think our parents are more important. I tell my son, "You live here in the United States but I am from Honduras and I'm going to teach you the same way we teach in our country. You have to know. I am your mother and you have to respect me."

A Hispanic from Mexico said this about her children, "My kids started coming in late. And I say "uh huh. My culture is not 11:00 is as late as you can stay out." My daughter say, "Mother, I live in the United States not Mexico." I told her, " my culture my rules." A woman from El Salvador discussed curfews for her children voicing, "Customs that we keep from our country, curfews and boyfriends and the way we think kids should behave. They think we were radical, that we were from another world."

A Cuban respondent talked about being an older Latina and taking care of the old expressing,

> Your kids take care of the parents. I know my kids will if I need. And probably when I start feeling I cannot do anything alone, I may move to be close to them. But nobody live alone in Cuba when you get old. There are no nursing homes. That does not exist there. So the families are all together. I don't say they don't fight when they are together.

A woman from El Salvador talked about going and getting her father after her mother had died so that he would not be left along saying,

> There was no other way. I am just bringing back with us. And I took care of him. The kids even felt good and enjoyed having grandpa home and taking care of him and getting to know him. There was no other way I would have done it. And I see that a lot in El Salvador. Of course, we don't have homes for older people.

Another woman from Central America felt it was a joy to have older family members live with you and explained,

> If we have our mom or grandmom it is like in our house in my country is like a blessing from God to have these old people live with you. And they are for us; they represent like replace friends like they are very special person. In my country we don't have home that care for older people, because they live with the family, with the children.

Latinas perceived they were especially very close to their mothers and a Latina confirmed this fact, "We are very close to our moms." Another respondent said, "I went to see my mom. I have been missing her a lot. I want to see her. If I could have my choice I would have my mom here."

Mothers may have a large influence on Latinas. One Latina's mother did not want her to work outside the home, the Latina stated, "My mom thinks I should quit and just stay home and take care of the kids."

Still a young woman from Mexico also suggested how much she likes to do things with her mother and offered,

> I talk with my mom, I do things with my mom. I do things with my mom even if I'm older. Even my mom she's 50 years old and she does the same thing with her mother.

> And my grandmother was 73. You know they will be talking, cleaning grapefruit together, eating it, just spending time together.

A Latina from Mexico voiced, "Your family is your whole thing. I was very close to my mom. I always go back to my mom. I still do. I still call her every time I think I need it. It's kind of different."

But another Latina saw that her relationship had changed with her mother and explained, "The old culture was mommy, mommy, you know, help me out. Not until they get very old and then you take that role as a parent." And yet a respondent did not feel close to her mother elucidating,

> I feel the biggest stress in my mother's relationship and mine is that she assumes a lot. She assumes closeness that's not there. She assumes she knows me as well as she thinks and she doesn't. She tries to make me a lot like her.

Interviewees often mentioned the importance of having their families live near, in the same neighborhood or same house. A Mexican had her children nearby, "The boys live here in the house. My oldest daughter, she's married and lives two blocks over. My husband's brother lives two houses down the street." A Mexican declared, "My mother has been living with us for five years and my sister lives nearby." Another Mexican Latina declared, "I just got a cousin. She moved upstairs two months ago. I thought it was going to be very nice to have somebody from my family." Another Latina had her family and her husband's brother living with them.

Other Latinas talked about not leaving their parent's home until they married or were much older than most Anglos. In fact, it was preferable if one stayed at home and went to school instead of going away to college and living in a dorm. A Latina from Mexico stated, "If you go to college, you find the closest one to your home. You do not leave your parents." Another respondent explained,

> Our college over there the students don't live in. He (son) still lives with me. He lives until he marries. When he marries and he doesn't have a place to live and I have a house. Maybe I make a station in my house another room. He would stay until he have his own house.

Another Latina from Central America talked about children in her former country and how they stay home much longer before going off to make their own lives.

> I would hear of 18 year olds leaving home when I first got here. Eighteen year olds who graduated from high school and left their families and to me it was so inconsiderable because you didn't even if you went to work. You went to college, the college was still in the same city so you were still at home.

A woman from Mexico saw a difference with non-Latinos and families and stated,

> I will say family here is very, very different. I'm not saying everyone, but like moms are waiting for their children to go to college in order to get some freedom. I have seen it in my work place. You know my mom would have never said that, never. She wants to keep you with her.

The interviewees expressed how close and loving Latinos families were. One Latina sensed her family was conditional with its support unconditional of her and offered this thought,

> You know when I grew up with my family, it was you know kind of like we were loved. If you didn't do what you are expected to do what a good girl is expected to do whatever you know they withdrew love or you didn't feel as accepted. You know because a woman was especially for a woman. You were supposed to grow up to be the perfect wife, the perfect mother, the perfect daughter. That was your role. And that was what you bred to be.

Another interviewee observed that, "Parents expect you to give back. I think that is very Hispanic."

Many of the Latinas came from larger families. A woman from Mexico made this clear when she said, "I have five brothers and sisters." A woman from Nicaragua stated she had four brothers and sisters. A respondent from Peru confirmed, "My Mom has probably 11 brothers and sisters and they are in Peru." Yet a woman from Honduras had only one brother.

The interviewees themselves did not have larger families; only 1 had four children, which was the largest. Five respondents had three offspring and 10 had two. Five interviewees had one child.

The Latinas talked about wanting to be with their children and having them close by. An Ecuadorian explained that the reason she moved from New York to Des Moines was to be near her son remarking, "The reason why I am here was because he's the only boy I have. New York opened doors for me. But my son decide to come over here and I miss him so much."

However, this was not true for two Latinas who moved to the United States as children. One of the interviewees remembered moving in with her grandparents while her parents stayed in Mexico. The Latina had living parents but was raised by her grandparent and explained,

> My parents stayed in Mexico City. I was the only one, the oldest. I lived with my grandparents. Later when I was 21 and had my little one, my dad decides to send my two siblings to live with me and we all lived in a little house in the United States and my parents were still in Mexico City.

A Guatemalan also talked about not living with her parents when she finished of school and how she was expected to take over the care of her brother.

> My parents went to California when I graduated from high school and started college. They left my brother behind to live with a best friend to finish high school. My mother thought that I would just take on the parenting role for my brother. And I said, "wait a minute. You're leaving, you're walking away from this. You're not going to make me do that."

Children were important to the Latinas. In fact, Mexico celebrates Children's Day on the 30th of April. A Latina explicated,

> Our culture is different. Some people think because we are Spanish people, the women have to work. No, the women want to stay home and care for the children and men to have to work and bring everything the family need. But it is not true,

> especially if we live here. Men and women have to work to live a little better. But if I live in my country it is the same because the situation is very hard. We have to work. But the Spanish women I think are more dedicated to the family, to the children. Care a lot for the children. Always want to stay with the children. Worry for the family. Feel the home is warm, we love.

Some of the Latinas came from families that stayed behind in their country of origin and tried to keep in contact with them. A young woman informed, "My father's still in Guatemala City with my extended family, i.e. uncle, aunts, and grandmother." A Mexican respondent talked about going to Mexico every winter for several months to be with her family. A young Mexican woman stated, "I don't have any reason to stay here except school. I wouldn't because all of my family is in Mexico."

In contrast, others had not seen their relatives for some time. As one Latina confirmed, "I have one grandmother that is still alive that's in Mexico but I've only met her once. I have several aunts and uncles but I have not met them. I don't know where they are."

The interviewees also had other relatives who came to the United States. A woman from Cuba commented, "By then my two sisters were in the United States." A woman from Honduras established, "All my brothers and sister are in Maryland. I am the only one in Iowa." A Latina from Peru stated, "Didn't have any family in Des Moines. I do have family actually in the United States, but they are like in New Hampshire. I have a cousin in Texas and two brothers in California. They have been there probably 16 17 years." A Latina from Mexico stated,

> I had two uncles and two brothers in Chicago. The reality was that when we arrived here we felt very sad because we were lonely. We have no family, just my two sons and two daughters but no family at all. It was kind of lonely.

Some of the Latinas when coming to the United States had to leave small children in their former countries in the care of relatives. After they were established in the United

States, they sent for their children. A woman from Central America demonstrated, "I came without my son. I had to. For four years my son was in my country wait for me." Another woman from Mexico talked about having to come to the United States with her husband when she was pregnant and already had two children. Her mother told her, "Just take the little one and leave the daughter here." Other Latinas came with their children when they immigrated to the U.S. A woman from Cuba came to the United States because of her children saying, "We're leaving this country because of the kids." She came with her three children. A woman from South America explained that she came to Des Moines with her two children, "I came back with a girl that was in fourth grade and a son that was ready to start kindergarten." A woman explained, "Seven months later, I came here with my children--my two sons."

There were Latinas who had family in both their former country and the United States. A woman from Mexico illustrated, "My brother lives in Mexico City and my sister came here to Des Moines to live. And now my Mother lives here."

At least one of the respondents was responsible for bringing her family to the United States. A woman from Ecuador illustrated,

> Actually because you see the most wonderful thing that happened in my life, my dream is to bring all my family to New York. So all of my family, all my brothers and sisters are in New York. I am very loyal. All my family come over here. And everybody's okay. I don't care if they have success but at least they have something to eat, whatever they wanted. They own a residence, they have rights. The new generation I know they gonna be somebody.

Some Latinas had older fathers or older husbands, often 10 years older or more, while others married someone their own age. A Latina from Mexico talked about her father, "He was 10 years older than my mother." Another Latina from Mexico explained, "I marry again a wonderful man. Thirteen years older than me but is wonderful." And a Mexican offered, "My ex-husband is 19 years older."

Family backgrounds widely varied. A woman from Nicaragua came from a very well-to-do extended family, though when her parents divorced, her Mother was left with less money. The interviewee stated, "My mom she was very tough strong. She was the one who had the money, her grandpa raised her because her father died very young. And her grandpa was the richest man in Nicaragua at one time." Another perspective came from a Mexican who explained that she had a hard childhood,

> My dad would work all the time, come home drunk, fight with my mom. We did not have a great upbringing. So I thank God I came out the way I did. I think my sisters are all hard workers but I do think they have some problems. We're not very affectionate cause my parents never told us they loved us. They were never there. They just worked and fed us. That was it.

The importance of family for the Hispanics was stressed in other ways as well. A woman from Mexico talked about how in Mexico, even restaurants stress the family. She explained,

> In Mexico we'll go to restaurants where the family has to be together in order to go there. It's like going to a coffee place. They sell *churros,* a Mexican pastry. They have tables of five always. Cause you go with your family. They try to keep families together.

Some of the interviewees were single moms with different issues. A woman from Central America stated, "I'm a single Mom with two kids whose father was not to visit. He has to have supervised visitation. I don't trust him with my daughter. I think he could molest my daughter." A woman from Central America offered,

> I miss a father figure for my children but I figure who cares? My grandmother raised three girls who did wonderfully in life. My son needs a father figure that my dad provides for in the summers, which is not a lot, and I don't want to get involved because I am too busy trying to do other things as a Hispanic woman.

Families helping each other was an agenda item for a few respondents. A woman from Mexico, living in Des Moines, was getting help from her family in Mexico. The Latina's husband was ill and they needed help. She stated, "We received a lot of help from family members back in Mexico in order to buy the trailer house."

Still there were other examples where the Latina and her family sent money back to family members still living in their country of origin. A woman from Central America explained,

> They get enough money to live by and all the extra money is sent home to their families. Families, you know mothers. Mothers are a big deal. Mother or wife and children. So you know they have very little. It doesn't matter how hard they work, they will only get enough to get by. And that's why you have many Latinos that are really poor living in one house. Many, many because that means more money for sending home.

Not all families were helpful or supportive of the Latinas. An Aunt kicked a woman from El Salvador out of her home. Her mother and grandmother were dead and she lived with various relatives. The respondent repeated her story saying,

> I didn't want to go back to my country because of my aunt and uncle. I did not get along well with them. My aunt said I was gonna take her husband and his money cause he was rich in my country. But he's 30 years old and I was 14 so what would I do? I didn't even know nothing about that stuff.

The interviewee also spoke of another aunt, with whom she had come to the United States. This aunt had her shoplifting in California after she had crossed the border undocumented. "We didn't have no money, no job, but she acted like, 'well no big deal.' She took her purse and she'd put stuff in it and then she wanted me to carry it out. I was scared and I was afraid that they might get me."

Summary. Family was extremely important to the interviewees. One Latina even deemed that one didn't have to like family but had to be committed to them. Family, in general, drove much of the Latinas' lives, but mothers were discussed in more detail than fathers. The interviewees saw their mothers as very pivotal and influential individuals--your mother came first. Mothers, the respondents explained, held expectations of their children and demanded to be the focal point of the family.

The interviewees expected that their children would stay at home much longer, until they got married. For several respondents even college was not a reason for a child to move out of the home. Children did not move out of the house until marriage and then they often lived with the family until the couple could afford a house. However, several interviewees were exceptions to their expectations and had moved to the U.S. as young people without their parents.

The interviewees offered that being Latino and living in the United States created issues between parents and children. Children of the Latinas were assimilating into the United States. This assimilation process was difficult to accept for the interviewees who wanted their children to keep some of the culture they knew. One interviewee was dealing with her youngest daughter going to college, the only child to do so. The problem was not college but the daughter going and living away from home in a dorm. The family was having difficulty with the young woman's decision, even though she came home every weekend to visit.

Chapter 8

FINDINGS: THE PUBLIC LIVES OF LATINAS

The interviewees had to make decisions about how to conduct themselves in a new culture. These decisions involved issues such as how to deal with friends, what holidays to celebrate, social situations, and for whom to vote.

I Voted

The lives of Latinas in Des Moines included involvement with U.S. and community politics respectively. Many of the interviewees had a strong interest in politics and actually campaigned for candidates. Some of the respondents had come from countries in political strife that did not understand a democratic process. Thus, the right to vote, to choose a candidate for office, to be able to speak out without repercussions, and to know one could make a difference was seen as a duty to some interviewees. The women occasionally were frustrated at how apathetic people in the United States could be toward elections. Others recognized what a luxury it was to be able to be impassive about elections because the government would stay in place no matter how the votes turned out.

The topic of politics was viewed in various ways by respondents, including the issue of voting and the right to do so. An interviewee had told her son,

> You are now a citizen of the U.S. You will vote and you will know the stand taken by the candidates. Latino immigrants cannot be ignored; there are or will be too many of us and more will come.

Another conversation dealt with the differences in elections between the U.S. and the interviewee's South American country. For this Latina, it was mandatory to vote in her former country or be fined. Even as an expatriate one had to vote at ones respective embassy. Those not voting were penalized upon reentry to the country. The Latina enunciated, "It was mandatory to vote. I already have my fines I haven't paid because it was mandatory to vote." The Latina went on to talk about the results of elections in her country and that the impact of these elections with respect to election outcomes. However, in the United States life really went on as normal.

> Here, life will go on as it was and it does not really matter who is elected, but in Peru, the schools may not be open, the busses not running, the police gone. Everything works here even though they complain about health care system and all that. But it works. I mean there is none in Peru. And people don't really care about politics here.

A story was related by a Latina about an elected president in her country who had changed the constitution so that he could be reelected. The Latina said, "In my case, our president was already in two of three terms, and he changed the constitution so he could be re-elected." The interviewee stated,

> So basically when you're a politician you do what you want do. And that's why we are probably still called developing countries. Underdeveloped because whoever is in politics, what they do is steal the money. And then everybody's starving and we have ten percent that you know are okay.

A woman from Honduras also talked about voting in the United States and how she considered that Latinos will make a difference saying,

> How we can help this country. They need our vote. I tell my son, "this is your first year. You gonna vote because you are citizen too. And they need our vote. The next time I see another candidate they cannot ignore us".

A Mexican woman conjectured that the Mexican government with its political corruption was what created her country's poor economy and forced so many of her countrymen to leave for the United States. The Latina asserted, "I blame the government, the Mexican government."

An individual talked about the persecution in her former South American country that led to the deaths of students who had different political beliefs than those in power. The interviewee construed, "There was a time where students at the University were persecuted in Argentina because of their political beliefs. And people were disappearing and mothers did not know where their kids were." Another woman from Central America talked about the conflict in her country with the guerrillas on one side and the government on the other. This woman stated,

> So we got really, really scared. And I think the main problem was my father-in-law being a teacher. And my husband being in medical school. The teachers were looked at as left wing and the medical students were looked at by the guerrillas as someone to take care of the wounded. A lot of classmates were kidnapped. My husband believed that he was being followed.

And still another talked about Cuba and the revolution against Castro saying, "We were working in the revolution against Castro. We were working under the orders of the CIA."

Several Latinas talked about the effect communism had on their country and how they reacted to it. One of the interviewees told of going to her college lectures that had been taken over by rebels who wanted the country to move toward communism. The Latina remembered laughing and joking with her cousin because the propaganda tactics did not seem real. The Latina recalled,

> I would go to class in the auditorium and instead of the class we will have someone talking, and the accent would be just like Fidel Castro. And because they were heroes, they would have a beard and they would talk scary and my cousins and I would giggle in the back. But we thought they were nuts. We had no idea that these things were real.

A woman from another Central American country also stated, "You know I was just so scared. Like when we had the wars in Honduras. I remember my father in Nicaragua. We were so scared that this communism was coming here."

Another interviewee discussed how it was now politically acceptable to be a Latino and that it was important to claim ones heritage; in fact, it was a responsibility to do so. The Guatemalan determined,

> You know it's a lot more socially acceptable, politically acceptable to be Latino. I hope that we embrace the opportunity, the freedom it has given us to really make something and help people to realize that in everything we do, we will always be Hispanic. You know it is the first thing people see and our responsibility. I mean that it is a big responsibility to our children and our heritage.

Four Latina interviewees were very active in politics within the United States presidential campaign, two from Mexico and two from Central America. A woman from Mexico declared, "I feel I like President Bush, I mean President to-be Bush. I just love politics. I was a teen leader for the Bush campaign. I still am. I just can't get enough." A Nicaraguan explained, "We want to go and see Bush. We want to get our papers and I say well even if you weren't voting for Bush you know you should because this is your opportunity to make a difference." A Mexican expressed her feelings about politics,

> I love it. My husband doesn't like it too much. One thing I ask my husband before we get married what party he is. And it was different than mine. But there was no problem. I am planning on going to the caucuses.

A Latina discussed the topic of immigrants as a political issue and that undocumented Latinos needed the ability to become legal. The interviewee stated, "It's politics because if you are here and you don't have paper work but yet you're working and you are paying taxes why don't we make it legal?"

Another individual observed policy makers were not building the much needed bridges between Anglo and Latino communities and perhaps women could get it done. The Mexican asserted, “Because we can relate to each other from our womanhood. And policy makers, police chiefs, mayors, congressmen have not been able to build a bridge of communication and understanding between culture. I feel that we woman can do that.”

Another political topic that surfaced was California’s Proposition 187 and the restrictions it placed on Latino immigrants. A woman from Central America stated, “I hated 187. I think one of the things that influence people moving to the Midwest quite a bit was that real restrictive State law in California”

Summary. The interviewees’ interest in political events was asset for the communities in which they lived. The Latinas interviewed were motivated politically and willing to actively support candidates. The respondents sought to make a difference in elections. The Latinas suspected that Hispanics would be a force for future elections and that candidates should not ignore the needs and issues of the Latino communities.

Music, Dancing and Friends

Latinas were social, outgoing, and enjoyed being with other people and relationships. The interviewees often felt they were in contrast with the Anglo community in that they were more casual and flexible with their relationships than with were Anglos. Friends were a large part of the social lives of the Latinas. For the Latina spending time with people was very important. The Latinas sensed they were more expressive, more emotional, and generally had more fun than Anglos. The women brought energy and enthusiasm with their lives to Des Moines.

The social activities of the Latinas involved people and they liked to go to or have them come to their homes, with or without prior notice.

Getting together with friends was a large part of Hispanic social activity and it often would include dancing. Latinas danced to such different Latin music such as Salsa, Maruichi, Cuban and Marenga. Most of the Latinas interviewed stated that dancing was the number one activity they liked to do for fun. They talked about loud Latin music and dancing at clubs or at someone's home. A Latina illustrated, "I love to dance; it is my favorite. We dance salsa at my house. And there is a big Salsa and Marenga dance coming up." A woman from El Salvador stated, "Everything we do is dancing. We could be just sitting here and eating dinner and then all of sudden something comes up and my husband will grab me and we start dancing. We celebrate everything by dancing." A Hispanic from Central America exclaimed, "I love to dance salsa." Another Central American asserted,

> But I do love to dance. I'm having a dance. This would be cool to have once a month for all of those people who don't have salsa, mambo, and things to dance to because they're of the minority. Where do Mexicans have social events that they can attend? They (Anglos) are catered to. But we are not. I don't dislike their music, well, I do, but I like the stuff that I saw my mom and dad sing and dance to. And that's what I love. And I do dance anywhere. I can be shopping and dance and sing. I just love music.

For Latinos music in general and from their country of origin was an emotional tie to their culture and a very important part of their recreation. Another Latina added, "I am a sucker for music." An Ecuadorian stated, "I love to sing and my music is still in my heart." A Latina talked about music, "Sometimes if I'm by myself, and in the house, I like to listen to the music; loud cause I'm up and down and around and I like to listen to the music and what it said. Spanish lyrics are so romantic." A young woman from Central America also stated, "I like to listen to our music that's the only thing I miss."

Some of the Latinas who had been in Des Moines for several years go to social organizations or clubs, like LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) to be out with other Latinas. A woman offered, "I used to belong to LULAC. I just stopped going for one reason or another. I also have a post polio group I go to it is very active. I also go out with friends and symphony and all of this." A woman from Peru also mentioned, "Just getting together with friends to talk or going to a restaurant with friends and just talk."

Another social outlet was the church. In fact it that church could be more of a social contact than a religious one. Another Mexican mentioned, "This was my activities, in the church I am a member of the choir." Another Mexican said social activities were, "From the church. I help a lot if there was a death and give out food and work with "AMOS", an organization from the church."

Two others mentioned volunteering for the Latino community as part of their recreation. A woman from Honduras said, "I volunteer at a Hispanic radio station two hours on Saturday and one on Sunday." A Mexican stated, "I represent the Spanish people on the AMOS board."

A couple of Latinas mentioned exercising such as aerobics or Tae Kwon Do, kick boxing, and playing golf as part of the social and recreational life. The Central American mentioned, "I decided to take Tae Kwon Do and Aerobics." A Latina made this confession about golf, "I'm going to play golf. I'm going to have fun. And if it takes me fifteen strokes to get from here to there, okay."

Watching Spanish TV (sometimes English TV but mostly Spanish) was also seen as a source of recreation. A Nicaraguan mentioned, "You know lately I have been watching

Spanish TV." Another Latina lamented that her neighbor watched so much Spanish TV, "Whenever I go to her house she has the Spanish program on TV."

Cooking and going out to dinner with friends were also mentioned as sources of social activities. A young woman said, "I go out to lunch with my friends who are Mexican or not, maybe Hispanic and go to Mexican restaurants. There is a restaurant in Ames that cooks Colombian." An Ecuadorian loves to cook saying, "I love to cook. And I know how to cook. I like to cook a lot."

One of the Latinas from Mexico wrote short stories and poems for relaxation, saying, "I write on paper the stories and poems. What I feel. I have a lot of poems. I only say whatever I feel. And that's what I put here, writing, thinking, but whatever I put it's because it was coming from here inside."

There were several Latinas from Mexico who talked about not having any social life or recreation activities in Des Moines. Part of the issue was not having any money to do so, working all the time, and not knowing anyone or not having any family to get together with. A Central American explained,

> You are on a survival basis. And the time they don't have time. And maybe one night a month they go to listen to a Mexican band to relax. You can't have the same priorities if you are doing everything just to survive. If your goal is to make the most money to send to your mother or your family in Mexico, you're not thinking of social. Social what's that?

A Latina stated, "There's nothing for me here, for me socially, for fun. I think people live only for work, home, and the store. And there's no more. Perhaps it is the weather. The weather does not allow it."

One Latina recalled her feelings when she was asked to participate at a retreat for work. She found the experience stressful when it was supposed to be viewed as a social and relaxing time for working so many hours. The Mexican said,

> I am not used to sharing a bedroom with someone who is not from my family. I'm not used to the meals you prepare. I'm not used to have to play games that I don't know how to play. Your idea of relaxing is not my idea of relaxing. I cannot speak Spanish to anyone here. For me to relax, I listen to my language, read in my own language, and talk to others in my own language. This is not relaxing.

The Hispanic went on to explain how important it was to her to be someplace where she could be 100% Hispanic. The interviewee said, "So having those spaces where you can just be yourself, without paying attention how you wear your jewelry or even your clothing or how you communicate your feelings its like another full time job."

Summary. The interviewees expressed the desire, actually the need, to be able to dance, talk, and eat Hispanic. The interviewees brought with them fun and way of life that was expressive and thoughtful and discussed how much that was a part of who they were as Hispanics. The interviewees had a strong need to be social, to get together with friends, to have a group, and they were inclusive--it included non-Hispanics. The respondents loved their music and loved to dance. The Latinas concluded that they found any reason possible to be able to dance and most did not understand why Anglos didn't. The respondents saw that dance and music were possible bridges to bring Anglos and Latinas together. The interviewees also believed that by bringing their social values to Des Moines they added zest to a rather dry community and added diversity by doing so.

The Calavera vs The Jack-O'-Lantern

Holidays and celebrations were important occasions for the interviewees. Many respondents brought celebrations with them from their former country and at the same time adopted new ones from in the United States. Sometimes, the Latinas were confused about how to handle what they knew, and what they were learning, about holidays. Holidays that had been so familiar in their country of origin became strange in U.S. Holiday dates differed, as did the manner in which the holiday was celebrated. Items the women were used to finding in stores to decorate and commemorate were no longer available. Thus, Latinas had to make celebration decisions that affected not only themselves but also their families. How does one maintain what one has always known or how does one embrace and learn new holidays and ways of celebrating them?

Individual holidays from native countries differed from those celebrated in the United States. However, what was celebrated in Mexico may not be celebrated in any other Latin American country or if it was, it was celebrated vastly different. For example, Independence Day for Mexico was September 16th; for El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala, it was September 15th.

Other holidays were mentioned. For example a Nicaraguan celebrated December 8th, the Immaculate Conception of Mary by saying a *novena.* Several interviewees mentioned Children's Day. Hondurans called it the Day of the Child and celebrated on September 10th, while in Mexico it was celebrated, April 30th. A Mexican talked about the cake she would get that had toy inside, you ate in January for King's Day. The Cuban Labor Day was celebrated May 1st.

Other Latinas interviewed decided not to maintain holidays or holiday traditions that were not replicated in the United States. A respondent talked about why she did not maintain former traditions explaining,

> The day of the dead was depressing because we could not find any of the stuff that we used to celebrate. Nothing absolutely nothing. The third year, one of my sisters bought the little skulls made of chocolate and sent to my children and they were so happy. It was no fun anymore because we don't have anyone else to celebrate with. When a holiday had very special significance in your former country and no one knows what you are talking about, it was very hard.

A Mexican explained, "The first few years I would celebrate a holiday but you know it was not the same anymore because the children had no one to talk to about it. So the children said, 'It is not fun any more.'" A respondent from El Salvador also found it difficult to celebrate holidays unique to her country saying,

> It's very difficult to celebrate things when nobody else celebrates it here. And I would love to but. There's one in May. It is the celebration of the harvest. The first years I did. What you do is make a cross and dress it up with colors on table in our house. You put a lot of fruit on it that day and everyone comes and eats from the table because that's when the harvest begins. I don't do it anymore.

Another woman from Mexico explained, "I do not celebrate holidays not celebrated here because it is too hard for me and my children." One more Latina explained a holiday she no longer celebrated, "*Semana Santa* in our country is very holy days and we cannot celebrate here because it is not an issue, it is not celebrated in the same way. We could not even talk about it. It is hard."

A woman from El Salvador added that many of the holidays celebrated by Latinas here in Des Moines were Mexican saying, "What the focus is here is the Mexican holidays, and we try to participate in them too because we feel we are cousins."

Patron saints from the Catholic Church were holidays celebrated by Latinas in their country of origin but may or may not be celebrated in the United States. One Nicaraguan talked about the patron saint of her town saying, "In my town, July 23 for the patron Santa Ana it is a big thing. Now I don't celebrate any and if I would change one thing now, for me, it would be to hold on to those celebrations and customs."

There were also holidays celebrated by Latinas in the United States that were not celebrated by Latinos in their former countries. *Cinco de Mayo* commemorates Mexican Independence from Napoleonic domination. On the May 5th 1862, the Mexicans defeated the French in the city of Puebla. In the United States, it was considered the official Independence Day and was the biggest Hispanic secular holiday of the year. However, Independence Day in Mexico was September 16th. One Latina exclaimed astonishment over the fuss of *Cinco de Mayo* saying, "We could not understand why they made such a big deal of *Cinco de Mayo.* I mean it is an important date but not the most important. I would say, ' what is the big deal?' And then 'congratulations for what?'"

Other holidays and celebrations such as Christmas and Easter were replicated in both the United States and countries of origin but not celebrated the same way. Examples were Easter Holy Week and Holy Friday and the Christmas *posadas.* One Latina noted,

> In Nicaragua, we never celebrated Santa Claus. We celebrated the birth of Jesus. Christmas the 24th at midnight we went to church and when you got back (home) baby Jesus had brought you presents. We would have a Christmas tree but packages were never underneath it and our house was much more decorated. We would have a huge dinner at midnight and around three or four in the morning we opened our gifts. And we would have a large nativity scene in the house.

A respondent from Honduras said,

> Christmas here is very sad for us. In my country Christmas Eve, we have the neighborhood, everybody cooks, make tamales, a lot for dessert and everyone have like an open house. So every neighbor coming to different house. Eat and dance. At midnight we have dinner with the whole family.

A Mexican also discussed Christmas *posadas* saying, "We have six parties before Christmas. It was just different."

A few holidays were bigger in former countries than the United States. The Latinas considered their holiday celebrations more grand than here, especially New Year's Eve. New Year's was celebrated with much more enthusiasm, much more festivity. It was common to stay up all night to celebrate New Year's with lots of music and dance. A Latina from Mexico stated,

> Here everything is so solemn like at Christmas. You know we know how to pray and sing and all this. But we also party. Here is so boring. So absolutely boring. I'm telling you I mean we love to party. We love God, we pray, we chat, we sing, we light candles we do all those things too. But we party, we eat, we dance, we talk, we share, we open gifts, we do all these things and we don't do it so solemnly like church. We do it with happiness, with joy because it is a joyful time. It is very frustrating. I need the liveliness. It is like a different drum. And the vibrations from people are different. I need it.

A Mexican noted, "New Year's Eve it's always been such a huge celebration in my family growing up. But not here." For Latinas, New Year's Eve was very significant, representing a fresh start, a new beginning. A mother spoke about getting together with friends, "I try to have friends we dance and stay up late and pray with the kids."

Yet a woman from Mexico had another perspective saying, "You celebrated Christmas with a dinner and family. There you don't know until the last minute if there will be enough money to make the dinner. Here when you work, you can eat, you can have food. There, no."

A woman from Honduras continued, "We were very poor and I remember when was Christmas time we don't have presents. But we were happy to have Christmas wait for midnight we're coming together with my brother and sister."

There were holidays that looked similar but were not, such as The Day of the Dead, November 2nd or All Saints Day, November 1st. In the United States, Halloween falls on October 31. In Nicaragua, a Latina described how they celebrated a holiday similar to Halloween on December 8th, saying,

> It's like Halloween here you know where you go house to house to get treats calling it *vitirai.* Instead of saying trick or treat you say *Quien causa tanta alegrai*? Who is responsible for all this happiness? The individuals from the house would exclaim '*La construccion De Maria.*' or the construction of Mary. It is a religious holiday done like Halloween.

Another group of Latinas decided not to celebrate the replicated holidays in their traditional manner but adopted the traditions of the United States. For example Latinas celebrated Mother's Day on the United States, date instead of on May 10th in their country of origin. A Latina from Mexico explained,

> Mother's Day here is movable. Mother's Day in our country is May 10th. It doesn't matter what day. It might be Tuesday or Thursday. So what do we do? Do we celebrate it twice? Do we celebrate on our day and we don't pay attention to the other day? And then we would forget to congratulate our mothers because we are picking a different day.

Another addition to the subject of holiday celebrations were ones the Latinas added that had not been celebrated before coming to the United States. Latinas who embraced a new American holiday did so usually because their children wanted to celebrate it. One Latina did not celebrate Thanksgiving for many years saying, "We didn't celebrate Thanksgiving. What is Thanksgiving? Why do you celebrate the Pilgrims coming over? Well, they came to the United States but they did not come to Cuba so we did not celebrate. We do now." Another Latina said, "I celebrate Thanksgiving and it's just an American holiday."

How to prepare the Thanksgiving turkey came up several times and that issues was a subject of controversy. Some of the interviewees did not know how to prepare a turkey or had a recipe that differed from the traditional ones used. A woman from Nicaragua said,

> I make it our style. You take a sharp knife and make ity, bity holes. And you take olives, capers, onions, celery, and spices put in a bowl and in the holes it covers the outside of the turkey with them. And you don't use butter but all the spices are in the little holes.

A Central American said, "I did not know you baked a turkey and cooked it on top of the stove."

The Latinas also included in family celebrations personal family traditions such as certain unique songs sung at a birthday. A woman from Central America described her family's personal birthday celebration, "Since I can remember, my dad had a 45 record with Happy Birthday. On our birthdays he always played it. And now we all have one." A Latina from Mexico explained a tradition for girls when they turned 15 saying, "In Mexico, we have a very big tradition that when the girls turn 15 they have a huge party, a *quinceaner*."

Summary. For Latinos, holidays and celebrations added to the choices and complexities of living in the United States. The question to celebrate or not to celebrate, teach or not to teach their children a certain holiday, a certain way, all added to the issues that Latinas faced. Did they wish to keep traditions from their own native country or embrace the traditions of the United States and how did they feel about doing so was a question pondered by the Latinas. How the Latinas were raised and how they wanted to raise their children, who are now living in a foreign culture were difficult questions. The Latinas found it hard to remain loyal to traditional Hispanic holidays not celebrated in the U.S. Often the children of Latinas did not enjoy the old holiday because they did not relate to it. One Latina who spent much of her time in California after having left Mexico said, "I do not celebrate any Mexican holiday." Several Latinas tried to hold onto former holidays but could not keep them up for varying reasons. One Latina regretted that she did not keep the traditions, "I think I have done myself harm. I let my things go. Now am I from here or there?" Latinas also were expected to embrace American holidays by children and friends.

Changing how holidays were celebrated or letting go of traditional holidays celebrations were frustrating issues and often times sad experiences for the interviewees. The idea of giving up what you had known, in order to embrace what was new, could be difficult. The Latinas had difficult decisions to make about what was usually taken for granted in their country of origin. Some of the respondents felt a sense of loss and nostalgia for holiday celebrations from their past. Nevertheless, respondents also found humor and joy in encountering and learning new festivities in a new land.

I Have Met Some Really Nice People

When asked about friends, the interviewees responded that friendships included just non-Latinos, just Latinos, or both. For some of the respondents, having friends who were non-Latino was easier than having Latina friends; other Hispanics were equally comfortable with both Anglo and Hispanic friends. Language, neighborhoods, work, and personalities were all factors in selecting friends.

One woman stated, "I guess my closer friends in Iowa are Anglo. My Hispanic friends are friends but I'm not as close." Another Central American woman had many social friends who were Hispanic but her closest was Anglo. The respondent said, "I have real good Hispanic friends but the ones who do things for me and I do things for them are white. My best friend is an Anglo. I baby sit for her and she does for me." Another said, "I have very good friends on both sides." A woman from Guatemala said, "My best friend is an Anglo and we are night and day different." An interviewee from Mexico exclaimed, "I have both. I think both are the same for me but I always say this, Latina woman are more complicated." And another Latina said, "I have both, but I have more Spanish friends." A Mexican exclaimed, "I have Hispanic friends, they are easier." A Young Mexican also added, "I have more Hispanic friends here." A Central American offered, "With Hispanic friends, you can just go over you don't call."

Language was a component that determined whether or not the Latinas had Anglo friends. If the Latina had the opportunity to meet other Latinas and did not speak English, most of her friends were Hispanic. A Peruvian enunciated, "I get along with Anglos and Latinas but I know people that have been here for five years and they still might not understand a joke and so stay with Hispanics." A woman from Mexico had both Anglo and Spanish friends but said, "It was more relaxing to be with Hispanics because you understand them better, especially when it comes to slang. I don't have to work so hard to be with Latinos." A woman from South America had both South American and Anglo friends but said, "I like to have people come to my house and talk. And there is a good group of Latinos from these different countries. We have one thing in common—Spanish--and it is really nice." A Mexican explained, "It is very hard to for me to try to get along with the Anglos because I did not understand what they were saying; it is very hard for my husband to translate every time we with them." Another Mexican stated, "I met someone who started a bilingual Toastmasters club. It was wonderful. There were people who wanted to learn English, others Spanish; we became friends. And after the meetings we would go out."

A professional woman and her husband had mostly American friends saying,

> In Des Moines, there are not too many Hispanics. Most of our friends are Americans. Occasionally there will be people here to do special projects for a temporary basis and we get together otherwise it is Anglos. We just meet Americans.

Some of the friendships had beginnings from acts of kindness from one person to another, regardless of nationality. For one Latina, it was when a neighbor woman was locked out of her house in the cold and asked to come in. When the neighbor came in, she found the Latina had nothing, no furniture and very few clothes for her children. The neighbor found her many furnishings for the house and even acted as a translator for a job interview. The Mexican went on to say, "She became a very good friend of mine. I have somebody to talk to, and whatever I need she see that I don't have and she brought to me."

A Mexican woman did not have any friends except her husband's boss's wife, who she found very kind. The Latina explained, "I did not have anyone to take care of my daughter when I delivered my baby so the owner's wife where my husband works, took her for the whole week I was in the hospital. I mean they have helped a lot. They are the most close friends I have."

For many Latinas, school, work, and church were places to make friends. A Mexican said, "My friends are people from communities that I have been involved like church, school, and through work. And just exercising I have met a lot of people." Another Latina explained, "If you go to my church on Sunday, it like being with people with me. So I have a lot of friends there."

For others like the El Salvadoran, friends had been made from neighbors. The Latina expounded, "Our neighbors have been really, really terrific. The neighbors are wonderful. That's why we have not moved from here."

Some of the Latinas kept friends from their country of origin and tried to meet every few years, if possible. One interviewee explained her reunion activities. "I spend the whole year calling them, the friends, following year we all went to Miami. Seven of the 18 that I graduated with all live in Miami now."

A young Mexican woman came across the border with her best friend but they became separated. At the time of the interview she did not know where she was. The woman offered, "My friend, she stayed in Los Angles; it was sad. Now I have two Anglos and two Hispanics because of the baby. I met them at the clinic when I was getting my checkup." Another Latina came with a friend but said, "I had my best friend here but they deported her."

A respondent from Nicaragua talked about not having many Hispanic friends in Des Moines because most of the Latinas here were Mexican, and she had nothing in common with them. A South American Latina made a similar comment. For the longest time I did not have any Hispanic friends because the vast majority were Mexican and I did not have anything in common with them."

Some of the Latinas found it hard to meet other Latinas, due to the lack of contact with other Hispanics in the area. One Latina did not meet any other Latinas until she started working. The Mexican responded, "I've made quite a few friends here at work. Probably I have mostly Caucasian up to this year. After working here I met and made Hispanic friends." Another woman from Mexico only met Caucasians from her job. The Latina commented, "At my job I met some American friends, even though I don't speak English. They are really friendly." Another Latina stated, "When you start meeting Latinas they want you to meet others so there is a network that begins." A Cuban affirmed, "And with Latinos you know one person and they want you to know another and you get to know more people."

Several of the Latinas mentioned a similar type of networking. When they finally found individuals from their country of origin, they started clubs that met for years. The clubs changed as more Hispanics came to the area and their children grew up. The clubs were more like a support group, especially if the spouses were Anglo. A woman from Central America explained,

> I met a woman and we have been friends ever since. Then she invited someone, and then we met a girl from Guatemala and Columbia. We became a really nice nucleus being Central American so to speak and married to Americans we used to meet once a month at each others house.

A Latina explained, "My only social group was a group of Latinos who had been here for awhile. I would go there once a month and meet other Latina woman that were older." Another woman offered, "I had my group of Latinas married to American men." A Mexican explained how she started a group. "I started the first Spanish club. Me and my friend and a woman from Guatemala we are all still pretty good friends. The rule is to speak Spanish and to teach our children our culture."

A college-aged Latina from Mexico said she did not have anything in common with Anglos her age and had better Latina friends. She said the connection was based on similar values. The Latina expressed, "I think it is tough to have American friends. Because I mean my age is kind of hard they think super different than we do."

An older Latina had met a lot of her friends from the Spanish classes she taught. The woman exclaimed, "Then when my husband die, he had not wanted me to do anything in the evenings. I start teaching at DMACC in adult education. And I met a lot of Latino people who I enjoy their company and other Americans. Through my classes I have met really nice people."

Another used a sorority at her University and a Toastmasters club to meet people, usually Anglo, where she practiced her English. This young woman said she didn't think that Anglos knew how hard it was for Latinas to make friends in Des Moines and that Anglos did not take the time to get to know Latinos. "Americans don't realize how hard it is for us. I have gone back and joined a sorority to be with people my own age. I felt that I needed to go back and be with them. But at the same time I am still in Toastmaster. I like being with my friends."

A woman from Central America said she did not want a close relationship with any Latinas because she did not trust them saying,

> I have Hispanic acquaintances but I don't have a desire to have a strong friendship. I think there is a lot of competition with Hispanic women. They're more into fighting at work and you go out and drink and everything will be okay. Women really don't have a sisterhood.

A woman from Mexico said, "It is easier to have American friends. It's hard here to be friends with another Latina because they're jealous and they don't want to help you. You get more help from Americans than Latinas."

Summary. The friends of the respondents were both Hispanic and non-Latinos. Still most of the respondents had made friendships with Anglos in one form or another; a few found that Latina friendships were easier, to maintain but mainly, again, because of language. A few of the Latinas surmised that as people got to know one another, partnerships and unions would make the unfamiliar, familiar. And some Latinas talked about not having Hispanic friends because either they did not have an opportunity to meet them or the Latina did not connect with the Latinos they had met.

Chapter 9

FINDINGS: BLENDING IN AND STANDING OUT

The Latinas learned to live in a new country by understanding its cultural differences and assimilating to them, while living among its residents and yet being subjected to its intolerances.

Hey Neighbor, Tacos?

Respondents viewed the question of whether the Latino and Anglo communities were segregated in multiple ways. Latinas deemed there was segregation because of a lack of communication between the two communities. The core issue for the Latinas was their inability to speak English and to connect with non-Latinos. A Latina wished, "I just don't want to see a big community of Latinos segregating themselves. I think they are right now just because of the language barriers. I don't agree with that. I don't like it at all." A Mexican concluded, "The language is a big issue for not having contact with Anglos." A Peruvian offered,

> I get along with both but I know people that have been here five or six years and they still might not understand the slang of American joke. And they kinda try to just be together with Latinos because of that and speak Spanish.

Another Latina observed that Latinos were somewhat segregated and it again had to do more with language barriers than anything else. The respondent said,

> I think the Latino community is separated now it is. Yep that is true. And that is probably their choice. They have their own parties and they get together and they

> don't really try to go out. And I think probably, I think language is number one. And I think it is culture too.

A Mexican explained, "I think a lot of the times it is the language, you know, because if you cannot communicate with each other it is a problem." A young Latina added, "I guess in a way the Latina community is separated from the rest of Des Moines. Mostly they speak a little bit of English and they hang around with their own kind because they speak Spanish." A Mexican mother further added, "Almost the Latinos do not see the Anglos. The *raza* (people) should be together more. It is not the fault of the Americans. The Mexican have to know how to speak English to get able to get together."

Latinas saw other factors that created segregation for Latinos. A woman from Central America argued, "The Latino community is separated from Anglos and it is getting worse. They're starting this thing, what was it in California, that they wanted to have a school all in Spanish. That's wrong." The Latina further added, "If you start segregating that way it's like the blacks having a black college. Excuse me, you have been fighting to be in front of the bus and you now want to go backwards? Can't do that. You have to integrate; you have to be with everybody else." Another Mexican Latina agreed with the issue of language but believed you did not have to give up your culture to integrate saying,

> But I am not for "we are we "and "they are they". I'm so against that. I think we are definitely the melting pot of you know. I don't think any other country has this many backgrounds or cultures together as the United States does. And I don't like to separate cultures and you are this and you are that. It's nice to continue your roots with your culture but then again you have to embrace what is here and make sure that you learn the language.

A professional Central American Latina perceived it was really important that Latinos not get isolated into their own world and said,

> We are not in little Mexico or little El Salvador. We are in Des Moines and we need to get to know Des Moines and the people of Des Moines. And the problem with

> these people is they don't feel comfortable. I would recommend that they need to first try as much as they can to learn the language. To visit, not only the Latino places, but also other places. To get used to the customs here. That's very important and that makes you very successful. Because that way once you have learned the customs and the culture here, then you can start giving also your culture.

In Des Moines Latinas saw segregation within the Hispanic community itself. The Latinos were in separate factions and separated from each other, which added to the segregation with Anglos. There were multiple Latino cultures in Des Moines and not all the Latinos understood each other, which also made it hard for Anglos to understand Latinos. A Peruvian woman talked about her Mexican husband saying,

> Within Mexico you probably have four or five different cultures. The culture of my husband is more European and American. His family does not dance at parties. My family at all parties danced. So it is really different. Within Mexico he loves the food and some music but there are other parts of Mexico that I love because of the dancing. And that is what you see here in Des Moines. So if you see him and them, they're from the same country but very different.

An older Mexican woman discussed how there were different groups of Latinos, with one of the groups made up of Latinos who had been in Des Moines for many years. The Mexican stated,

> There are two groups of Latinos in Des Moines, the ones who were born and raised here or have been here a long time, the older people. When I first moved here I could not understand why they pretended to be Americans and now I do. They don't want to identify with Hispanics. It is the way they were raised, and it was a different time. They had to fight for their rights, they got jobs, learned English, and now there are the new immigrants.

A woman from Central America talked about going to a meeting for the proposal of a Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and came away confused saying,

> I went to the Chamber of Commerce meeting and I thought why are we having a Chamber of Commerce for Latinos? This family from Nicaragua had gotten a couple of loans from the SBA, now he has a printing firm with I don't know how many employees. Now his son is becoming president of the company. They're requesting a new loan. So now tell me why we need a Chamber for Hispanics only? This guy did pretty well with the English one. And I think it is amazing when they were talking

> about how talk about these guys and it was mostly guys not helping each other. Now we are going to do a Latino Chamber. It just does not make sense. We're doing a Chamber for Latinos. If we're doing this does it mean that when they went to the United States Chamber of Commerce they are denied membership because they are Latinos? No one said that. And basically, what is said was we need to be united. Yep, that is true. You don't help each other and yet once we're leaving the meeting we get slightly to talk to the hierarchy and you want to know why you guys don't flourish.

A few Latinas mentioned they did not have contact with other Latinos in Des Moines because they didn't relate to them. These respondents sensed that most of the Latinos living in Des Moines were Mexican and poor. Many of the interviewees were from a different social frame from Latinos they encountered in the community. A Mexican also stated, "The Latino population in Des Moines are from very poor resources. They are not educated. I come from a society where everyone goes to college." And a Central American also said, "I guess I have not been exposed to a lot of Hispanics here."

Other respondents concluded that Hispanics should help each other integrate into the larger community. "I think as long as the Hispanics help each other but stay integrated with the American community, they will flourish." Another Hispanic added, "I think we all need to be more integrated. We are all in the same city." A Honduran deemed that Latinos were separated and suggested, "It is something that nobody but the Hispanic community has to do for itself. And I think it is to learn to integrate. Stop this business of being different and separated from everybody else."

A Mexican believed younger Latinas were trying to find links into the Anglo community saying,

> The question is if we are separating, we shouldn't but again it is hard to get into Anglo circles. But we are trying, I think. We're trying, you know, the new generations are trying to find a link. Like I am. I need to find a something that can link me to the world.

There were a couple of respondents who approached the issue of segregation completely differently. One interviewee took the approach that it was attitude that created separation between the Anglo and Hispanic communities saying, "I did not come to this country with an attitude that everybody has to come to me and pamper me. It is your attitude. The separation of Anglos and Latinos is such a negative attitude." A Mexican suggested that it is not the separation of Anglos and Hispanics, but of class. The Latina stated, "Here there is not such a class distinction between rich and poor. The upper class in Mexico does not like the poor."

Two Latinas from different Central American countries surmised that Latinos were segregated out of necessity. A Nicaraguan said,

> When people are really, really poor they have to stay in their own communities because they don't drive, because everything cost money or because they don't have the time. Most Latinos here are very poor in Iowa. They have two or three jobs to get by so there is no time left. They have very little that is why you have several Latinos who will live in the same house, to get by.

A Latina continued by saying that if you were poor you didn't have the energy to make the effort to integrate with someone you could not speak to. The Latina said,

> If you are talking about a poor neighborhood staying separated, it is because if you are poor you have no time or ability to connect with the outside community. And I would guess, tell me if I am wrong, to make life bearable and easier so you don't have to spend money and any other resources whether it was emotion, times, energy or money.

A Honduran saw lack of credit as part of the issue why some Latinas were segregated in Des Moines saying, "I think it is a housing issue. You know whites have better credit, so you can buy homes. You make more money than I make because you're white. Because you're better educated, so that puts us in certain neighborhoods."

A Mexican woman complained that her church added to the separation of Hispanic and Anglos saying,

> I see in my church it was Anglo and Spanish. And the Father said all the time, "Everybody the same supposed to be together. It is one congregation." Why in certain times Anglos separate? Like when we have a celebration for the sisters? The Anglo have one and the Hispanic have another. I did not like it.

A Latina claimed that non-Latinos were separated from the Hispanics by choice, "They don't like the Spanish people. The Anglo need to learn more about the Hispanics." A Mexican added her perspective to the previous thought saying,

> There was a few places was Anglos and Hispanics intermingle like the *Latinos Unidos*. There are a few Americans there. It would be better if we are more united but one of us would have to change our ideas and that is very difficult because we have our own ideas. But it would be better because there would be less separation. We would both benefit. We would see things more clearly.

A Central American explained that she believed Hispanics wanted to be a part of the non-Latino community and exclaimed,

> I think that Anglos need to know that we are here. That we don't want to be away from the Anglo community. That we want to be a part of it. We may act a little different in some ways but we're still nuns, we're still wives, we're still lovers, we're still cooks you know we're just like Anglos. We want to be a part of the Anglo community.

A respondent suggested that integration was important for the success of Latinos in Des Moines and said, "I think if we are integrated it would help because it would make us feel a part of the community and maybe we would strive more. I am integrated in the community because I am a homeowner and I think that is a big deal for the Hispanic community." A Central American concluded, "We are not here for free. We need to be brought to the community so we understand you better. The Latinos need to be incorporated into the community in different ways." An El Salvadoran related a story about her neighbor that made her think that Latinos and Anglos should keep working on ways to integrate saying,

> It's really funny. One of the people I work with said, "Ya know, you've got to tape some Latino music for me." I said "Why?" And he said, "Well across the street from me lives this guy. I don't know where he is from but he comes and sits in the back of his house with his buddies in the summertime and listens to music." And I think that was so neat. My husband does the same thing. And I keep telling him to turn the music down." So I asked my neighbor if it bugged him. He said, "No, hell don't turn it down. I like it." So yeah I think we need to integrate more here.

Summary. Des Moines at the time of the interviews, the Latinas were disbursed throughout the metro area. The respondents deemed integration of the Hispanic community was important and that there should be more opportunities to have contact with non-Latinos. The interviewees concurred that being integrated helped them to better understand the community. The interviewees also believed that more opportunities would happen for Hispanics if they had more contact with the larger community.

A Latina noted that language and economics forced a number of Latinos into certain neighborhoods so, by default, it had a higher concentration of Hispanics.

I Don't Want to Lose Who I Am

Did the respondents acculturate or assimilate? By acculturation, did they adapt to a new culture by learning, how to live, what to eat, what language to speak, how to behave and what to keep from the old culture and what to discard? Or, did they assimilate by disregarding aspects of their former immigrant culture and adapt totally to the new host society? The debate of whether the interviewee had gone through a process of acculturation or assimilation came up in miscellaneous topics throughout the interviews. Some respondents left all of their native culture behind and adopted a completely new way of living. Others found a way to blend parts of their former culture with the new one.

Some of the Latinas assimilated and totally immersed themselves into the United States culture, keeping very little from their native country, not even wanting to be called a Latina. These interviewees had mostly Anglo friends, perhaps were married to an Anglo, and had little to do with the Hispanic community. The Latinas who assimilated spoke more English and supported only speaking English. These Latinas took the stand that you were in United States, do as the Americans.

A Latina from Argentina surmised that it was fairly easy for her to assimilate exclaiming,

> My former culture was so similar to the United States. Our values are probably more American than Mexican. Most of our friends are American. You know, I don't consider myself Latina. I consider myself a person with a family the same. This is my town now. I am an American living in Johnston and trying to survive like everybody else is and trying to pull my family together and see that my kids are successful. I don't discriminate myself.

The Latina also offered, "We kept a celebration for a few years but we continue with the customs of the United States. A Latina from El Salvador discussed a friend who became totally immersed in the Des Moines cultural and the Latina feels she had done really well. The woman offers,

> My friend when she came didn't speak any English. And she did not stay in the Latino world. You need to get to know people from here, to learn and be familiar. That's one thing that annoys people. When you go to another place and you don't know the customs. And they think these people were breaking them but it was because they don't know; they have not learned. To me anybody who comes here should do that.

A woman from Mexico talked about a friend who would not try to learn anything about the United States and was frustrated with her saying,

> She must learn the language and engage where she lives. My friend she doesn't speak English and watches Spanish TV all day. She has been here four years and she was gonna wait till her children go to school and have them teach her? She does not want to learn.

The interviewee had learned a great deal about living in the United States and also recommended, "Do not give up yourself completely in the process of learning how to be a United States citizen."

A Mexican who did not feel very Mexican described, "I don't know Mexico. I have a lot of relatives I have never met. That's so unusual for a Mexican. I was the only child that's so American more than anybody. I have Anglo friends. I don't speak Spanish I speak English." Another Mexican related,

> I've just been so detached from the Mexican culture for such a long time. I love the food. But I am sorry. I just can't think of anything that I've kept other than being close to my family. I am thrilled to live in this country, and I don't like separate cultures.

A Latina who married an Anglo explained, "I live here. I try to go what you know people do here, like Thanksgiving. I'll go by wherever I am."

A Latina talked about the differences she saw in Hispanic people who had been in the United States and what happened to those individuals. The interviewee remarked,

> They don't want to speak Spanish, and actually their Spanish is not so good, or they changed their names. They might have been Jorge but they change it to George. They are more American than Spanish. They don't feel anything for the Spanish culture and you could offend them by calling them Spanish. They say, "No, I am from the U.S." But it's funny because they look Spanish. I'm thinking you look like you would be speaking Spanish but you don't.

The respondent thought when people wanted to assimilate they forgot their past; they wanted to be American so they distanced themselves from the Spanish language and customs.

A Mexican woman who bore and raised her children in Des Moines was asked by one of her children, "Why don't we celebrate holidays like Thanksgiving like everyone else?"

The Latina explained, "I made the decision that he was right and adopted the holidays of the United States."

Conversely , Ecuadorian was acculturating and was adamant that she and her son keep their culture as much as possible. The interviewee offered,

> Don't you tell anyone that you are an American. You have to say, " I am from Ecuador, South America. I am an Indian." Now because you are in America you don't have feathers in your hair and you are wearing shoes because you are in America but over there your father never had shoes; it must be respected. Here I'm American so I follow the same customs as Americans.

An interviewee would have liked to have acculturated and kept more of her culture but her Anglo husband did not like them. The Latina said,

> My husband told me I had bad taste, so I did not feel free to do my own things. And I could have. But there are so many things that I have let go of only because when I weigh them I don't think well. I let go of much the same with my traditions I let them go. I wish I had never lost that connection with me. You know a long time I was trying to please other people and I lost track of myself. If I could give advice I would tell them not to do it. But it was hard. I am working on that with my children. I am raising little aliens.

A Mexican offered, "I have more Latino friends here. More Hispanic than American. I do think most of the things I do are more Mexican."

While some of the individuals were quite content to have gone through this process of assimilation, others felt as if they had lost a part of themselves. Some of these women were going back to establish themselves as a Latina with an ethnic background embracing the culture they left. One Latina stated, "I identify with brown. I am giving back to the Latino community. I feel as if I have abandoned my culture. I mean for me saying that I'm brown makes me say, "okay remember. I'm not from here." An interviewee talked about knowing where she came from saying,

> I actually got my major in Spanish literature. It was kind of cathartic for me in a way. I think it was getting back to my roots. An opportunity for me to get in touch with my

> roots but not really because I always knew where I came from. But to understand more and I was very passionate about that.

A Latina who was struggling on how to adapt in the United States was frustrated saying, "After a while Latinos who come to live here change their ideas after having lived here a while. They leave their culture and adopt the culture here. You cannot maintain your own culture here very easily." An El Salvadoran exclaimed,

> It's a learning thing. Because we're not like I said spontaneous. So it's been learning for me in order to get into this culture to do it. And it was not hard but I had to put my mind to it. I feel that was one of the ways that you can succeed without losing your personality. In a way that okay if I am in this job I am gonna do whatever. But once I am out of this job I am gonna do whatever.

Other Latinas acculturated, fostering culture from their native country and yet learning ways to be an American in the United States at the same time. They had both Latina and Anglo friends, spoke both Spanish and English, cooked native foods when they could, and listened to their former country's music. They also cooked turkeys on Thanksgiving. A respondent explained,

> I see too many of my friends that just forgot everything about their culture in Mexico. I try to remember and learn from here too. I love this culture. When someone dies you take it normal. It was supposed to be that way. I tell everybody take the good of this culture and never forget your old culture. You never forget where you come from. You never forget your language, your culture. You take the good here you learn it. *Pero* you never say never. I remember where I come from.

A Mexican Latina stated she loved being able to take what she liked both from this country and her former country and put the two together. The respondent had the ability to discard what she didn't like and keep what she enjoyed from both worlds. Other Latinas also, warned, "do not forget your old culture." Another Latina claimed, "I have a second culture and am totally free to keep both." Another respondent added, "I made my own family, my own community and my own practices. I am very comfortable in my world."

A Latina from Mexico believed the only way she could handle stress was to be Mexican. The Latina explained,

> The reason things like listening to music in Spanish, to eat Mexican, or to be able to speak Spanish at our home and to read or to watch a show or something in our own language. That was a way to cope with stress of living in a foreign country with such different customs and ways to live. You get very tired of speaking in English most of the day. So to me that was like coping and a restful time. When I am able to speak my own language and to express fully my emotions and my feelings and my thought freely.

For this Latina relaxation involved cooking Mexican, speaking Spanish, listening to Spanish music, watching Spanish TV, reading in Spanish—doing anything that was Mexican. The respondent finished, "When I am able to speak my own language and to express my emotions fully and my thoughts freely oh that was like I can't wait."

One of the Latinas talked about how confusing it was to try and determine what to adopt and what to disregard from the American culture. The interviewee's example was,

> It took us awhile to understand that a celebration adopted by the Mexicans here was about the end of the Mexican American war. They took pride in it and it was extremely important to them. And they did not celebrate Mexico's Independence Day. Well we did also for two or three years until we realized this was getting ridiculous here we were celebrating the Fourth of July, celebrating September 16th, celebrating *Cinco de Mayo* so were kind of confused.

A Latina had this to say about the process of acculturation or assimilation.

> Women must share their experiences as immigrants and find out what are our perceptions and what are our realities and then what are the realities that we want to have next. And find a solution coming out of ourselves, not using the Anglo model because it doesn't work with us. And not using the model we bring with us because it doesn't work here. We need to come up with a different model that works for us in this society. And that was quite a different thing than what there was out there. It was a lengthy process and it was not a process that can be done by people outside of this population. But we need their resources and the tools to help us go through that process to accelerate the acculturation because I agree with you, we were not assimilating; we were acculturating, but it was not out of our choice or a conscious choice. It was partly out of choice partly out of need and partly because we were not accepted.

A Central American found it hard to go back home even though she missed what she had had as a child. The Latina explained,

> I miss the memories. I miss the people. But once I am there it is fun. But this is home, and I miss here when I am gone. So I miss the quiet too. And I love to go visit, but just that. And I'm sure I if I decided that I wanted to make home over there again. I would be able to survive, but it would take a lot out of me to do that. And I am not ready to do that. So this is home.

Summary. The process of either acculturating or assimilating is a process of time. Some Latinas had decided to conclude, "I now live in the United States in Des Moines, Iowa." The respondents also proclaimed, "I am an American, I live here. I am no longer only a Hispanic." While other interviewees were more cautious claiming, "I am and will always be a Latino, I am first and foremost a Latino. I will eat, play, and speak for the rest of my life as a Latino. I live here but I will not give up who I am."

The respondents were fairly mixed on how they should embrace living in the United States. Interviewees witnessed Hispanics who had come before them and how they integrated into U.S. culture; some saw it with disdain and others with admiration. There were individuals who surmised they had assimilated and saw it with a sense of loss. Latinas wanted to embrace Latino culture and blend it with their new one.

Hug, Kiss, Kiss

Hispanics and non-Latinos are culturally unique and bringing two distinct cultures together is a challenge. Different languages, foods, entertainment, and expectations can clash and create misunderstanding. The cultural differences between Anglos and Latinas were sometimes subtle and other times vast. Latinos and Anglos approached life very differently, with contrasting expectations and norms.

A Mexican saw Latinos as more motherly, more giving, and hard working. The woman stated,

> Latinas, especially if they have just arrived from their former country, are very hard working, giving and very motherly. Hispanics are very devoted to their families and bring warmth with them that is missing from Anglos. Anglo women put their careers before their families. Latinas are starting to be that way, but I think inside there was still the motherly instinct to stay home.

Another Latina agreed, "Anglos are too materialistic. I see them working and not spending time with their families and in general did not put people first." A Mexican added, "I think we are more human, so we are a little more family oriented."

Several Latinas did not work in their native country and said they never would have because it was the man's responsibility; it was expected that the male in the family be the main or sole breadwinner. An older Latina said, "I would not be working at my age. And anyway, anyone who works has a cook with two hours off between 12 and 2." Relationships with husbands could be viewed differently. A Cuban explained,

> Cuba is a chauvinist country. My husband would never like for me to work at night. He did not like for me to even go out at night. My daughter and I would exercise at 6:00 p.m. and he would say, "Well another night out." I got tired of it and stayed home.

Food was seen as another cultural difference. A Cuban said, "Every time I invite somebody to my house for lunch or dinner, I always cook Spanish food." Eating ethnic foods and spices from their country of origin was very important; it was seen as a cultural event. An interviewee stated, "We always had a cooked meal for breakfast and cereal was a treat on Sundays. When I got here I could not believe all the choices for cereal there was. I had no idea." Respondents believed that they ate fresher homemade foods and not so many canned goods compared to Anglos. Another interviewee commented, "I cook Mexican food. I try to eat more natural foods." A woman from El Salvador said, "I love to keep traditions. It takes a bigger effort to do that. I love to see the family sit at the table and eat a meal that I prepare everyday." Eating together as a family was a cultural difference. A Latina cited,

> In my country everybody would go home to eat lunch. The families were closer together. The mother, the old lady, would stay home taking care of the kids and cooking. So you could go home and have your lunch and the person that stays in the house the mother, the aunt, the grandmother would stay home and do the work.

The desire to eat together was important, but the ability to do so could be difficult in the American culture. A Mexican talked about her stepchildren and what they were used to eating saying,

> They are not used to home cooked meals. It was hard for me. At first I had to buy just canned food for them. I say, they have to get used to regular food. I mean it was really different. Having a family dinner was important.

The subject of mealtime was also seen as a cultural difference. One Mexican stated,

> At the beginning it took us several months to get used to the schedule here for meals. In Mexico we have our breakfast early in the morning. Then we have a main meal at one to two in the afternoon. Then we would have something but not too light or not too heavy at seven or eight o'clock at night. We had a hard time with lunch at noon for half an hour. It was rushed. You do not have time to talk with your family or to do anything. It was horrendous. And then, well, we wanted to keep eating Mexican food and it was very hard to get the ingredients in order to cook Mexican. I told my husband, " If I am not able to get chilies and tortillas in Des Moines I am not living here."

The drinking age was different for the Latinas; they were used to being able to give liquor to their children at any age. A Latina offered, "You can drink any age there my country. I was amazed that you have an age to drink."

A set time to put your children to sleep was foreign for several of the interviewees. Your children stayed up if you were up and went to bed when you went to bed. If the Latinas were invited to a party, they brought their children with, and if they stayed all night, so did the children. The Latinas did not use baby sitters. One Latina stated,

> I grew up going to parties with my parents dancing until three o'clock in the morning. And there was nothing like, "It's your bedtime!" No you just grab a couch there and sleep. Your parents are having fun and you are sleeping. It's our culture.

A woman from Peru stated, "I think in our culture even if you're married and you have kids and you're going to a party, you're taking the kids with you. So it's not like if you're married you can't have fun." Another Latina added that she would not have a party that would not include children saying, "I'm never gonna have friends over and say, "no kids." There were a lot of American parties, no kids. I want kids to come. Cause I think the parents were more comfortable their kids were there." A Peruvian added, "I think it is great when you have your parents and the kids having fun. I have been to parties and have a three-year-old dancing with his dad, and that is how they get to the whole dancing and Latin music."

Parties did not have a set ending time. An invitation would not say when the party was to end and often they would last late into the evening or early the next morning. Parties would also start much later than the time sent on an invitation. If an invitation said 12:00 the quests may not want to arrive until 3:00. Another Latina added that if a hostess has a party with Latina friends, only 20 guest are invited, not 40, because they were going to bring their friends.

Another cultural difference cited by Latinas was dropping in on friends without an invitation. There were Latinas who hated this custom and did not want individuals dropping over, while others were adamant that people should not have to call but just come over. An interviewee responded, "I miss having people dropping by without calling. In my country people drop by any time which people think was rude here." A Latina from El Salvador said, "We are not the schedule type of people. You say, "Hey I've got beans. Sit down have some coffee."

A Latina from Honduras reviewed a discussion she had had with her sister about differences in the United States and told her sister that it would be hard to go back home saying,

> You'd never get used to going back home anymore. Because you already know your way around you know exactly where you're going when you're going how fast you're going to get there because you are always running a bit late. They say that about us Hispanics you know we're always late or we always leave things for tomorrow. And I can see that one of the reasons we have our high rate of heart problems was because of our diet not because of our pace. Here it is because of our pace and not because of our diet. So things material wise were better here emotional relationship-wise even though I hate my cousins I still have to say that as people we do all things based on relationships. Here it is let's get to the point, cut and dried, lets not beat around the bush.

Vacations were also a cultural difference as Latinos take a three-week or longer vacation to visit family in their former country. A woman offered,

> I value a trip to my country and taking a vacation for two to three weeks because it was gonna cost me a lot of money. That was culturally different. I have been working at this company for a long time and I hear people say, "I can't believe that man was leaving on vacation for three weeks." Well he was leaving the country. "Oh I can't believe he was going to the funeral for two weeks." Well culturally it was that people don't understand.

The topic of time off was something that the Latinas conjectured non-Latinos did not understand with respect to the Hispanic culture. A Peruvian stated, "One thing about American culture, you only get two weeks of vacation; that's all. Most of Latin America gets a month off."

Several Latinas talked about having a chaperone which was a very important custom when they were growing up and dating. A Cuban remembered,

> I got a chaperone until get married. And that was the custom everyone did it. My daughter was invited to a dance when we moved here. She was in sixth grade and he was a senior but I did not care because I was going with. Well I did not know that in this country you do not have chaperones.

Another Latina from Central America said, “Everywhere you went you had a chaperone. Even when we were younger we would go to parties, there would be five of us and a parent. And when we started to date you always had to have someone with you all the time.” A Latina said, “It felt funny going back home as an adult and telling my parents where I was going with my husband. A woman from Mexico considered, “Families were more structured for girls. There were very strict family rules for girls. You could not go out alone and you do not attend parties until after the age of fifteen.” A Mexican raising her children in Des Moines presumed, “My children have too much freedom, especially my daughter.” A Mexican said, “In Mexico there’s a cultural thing like with my boyfriend. I don’t spend the weekends with him. That’s a custom in Mexico; you cannot. I do think I do most of things I do like Mexico. Like I don’t go out very late.”

For a Latina from Central America another difference was manners and how important she observed they were. The woman stated, “Rudeness was beyond my comprehension. I will not tolerate anyone being discourteous.” A Mexican explained, “You greet people, you acknowledge them. It makes them feel human.”

Dancing was big for Latinas and dancing with anyone not just your boyfriend or spouse. A Honduran remembered,

> It was my mom’s birthday and we invited friends over. We had a dinner and afterwards we had music and we started to dance. My father always danced the first song with my mother. But then he would go around and ask every lady to dance. But here it was taboo. I was like you were kidding. When I came here I would not think twice about asking my friends’ boyfriend to dance.

Several interviewees talked about how laid back and boring people were from the Midwest and that Latinas had more spice, were more fun loving, and overall, more exciting.

A Mexican stated, "People here in Des Moines, there's not that bubbly excitement that I know Latinas are about." One Latina discussed, "Passion, how much more embracing Latinas are than Anglos. There is a richness of feeling of being passionate about how you feel." A respondent insisted, "A common trait in a lot of Latin woman is they are passionate and they are in your face about it and that is the way it is." Another interviewee put it this way, "Midwesterners are so reserved in showing any emotions and thus isolating. People are so private and need to have their space." A woman from Central America stated, "People are not very affectionate and do not like their space invaded." A Latina from South America deduced, "People from Des Moines are shy and did not like to talk; they aren't talkative. They so quiet, they just mind their own business sometimes you think they are rude. But sometimes they are shy." A woman from El Salvador said, "Des Moines is very quiet. Families stick together. We're more sticky; we get together and like adopt our neighbors and have fun." A Guatemalan also added,

> People here are reserved. People really respect your privacy and your space. To me Des Moines there is no sense of community. In my country you build a sense of community there is a lot more emotion. I noticed with my husband's family, they love each other dearly but they have a hard time touching each other. We're not hugging. Like in pictures. All my family pictures you have your arms around everyone else even if you hate them.

Another Latina continued the theme saying,

> There is a lack of commitment to friendships or just interacting with people. In my country you have ten million best friends. You know Latinos, are a lot more open to bringing you into their homes. You know interacting with you, sharing with you, you know they are very warm, very huggy. Anglos do not have a sense of community.

However another Latina suggested that Anglos were more likely to help with a project than Latinos were. "Latinos are selfish, great about parities but poor on helping. Like if a friend is going to paint for the whole weekend, Latinos would not help but Americans would. It's just different."

Another respondent thought Anglos were too rushed with people saying, "Anglos do not take time for people. That relationships and people were not given time." For example she said, "We would always invite someone to come in and sit, offer some coffee or drink, ask about their family, and then do the business at hand." Another woman stated, "If you come into a Mexican home, you will always be offered something and to come and sit at the table."

Touch was another cultural concept that was very different for Hispanics and non-Latinos. Interviewees stated that they were more likely to hug, kiss, or touch than an Anglo was. One Latina replied, "All my Hispanic friends know that I will hug or kiss them. Anglos are very uncomfortable with this." A woman from Mexico said, "Like we hug but we hug with all of our heart. And if I hug an American like that they get afraid." Greeting people with hellos, hugs, and kisses was viewed by the interviewees as a difference between the two cultures. A woman from El Salvador said, "We keep the custom that when we meet somebody you greet and kiss them on the cheeks." A Mexican related her first holiday, "The first time that I was here at Christmas time, I started hugging my co-workers and they look at me like I was out of my mind. I thought, 'oh, oh I was not supposed to do that'"

An interviewee from South America perceived that an American custom of repaying a small dept was strange. The Latina explained,

> If someone comes and borrow a dollar or like fifty cents, I don't expect them to pay it back to me. I mean if it was more than five, ten maybe. But I have situations that they ask me for like fifty cents for coffee and they bring it back. That really is American culture. For us it was not like there was kind of an offense. We just think it was

> funny. I mean that's one custom that I am not going to get used to. And it was not gonna go away.

A couple of interviewees mentioned the concept of competition among Latinas which they didn't see to a great extent between Anglo woman. A Central American said, "Anglos can have a sisterhood but Latinas do not. I think there is a lot of competition with Hispanic woman. There is very little camaraderie and more competition among Latinas." Another Latina made the comment, "I don't find Latinas very safe; you can be betrayed or hurt." Another Latina stated, "Hispanics are conditional but Anglos are more unconditional towards each other."

One interviewee believed that Anglos were too casual with the way they dressed, especially in Des Moines. The South American stated,

> You don't care about clothes. You can go anywhere the way you want. But the place I work, my God, I wanna cry. The people were in those terrible T-shirt, blue and denim and guess what I was always dressed up? I cannot wear those clothes. I don't even have a T-shirt. I don't like them.

The respondent found the way that people dressed and went to work offensive. She felt that people going to work in T-shirts and jeans was wrong. Most, but not all of the interviewees, were dressed up and wearing make up at the time of the interview.

A woman from Mexico considered that Hispanics in general were more formal in social situations. For example, Hispanics would not call someone by his/her first name until after getting to know them. Latinas would use titles such as Mr. or Mrs. The respondent clarified, "Like if you talk to somebody that you don't know, you do not talk to this person like you have known them for years. I don't know if you remember when we talk to someone it was like we call them Mr. So and So, Mrs. So and So. Just we do not go to the 'you' right away."

A Mexican also feels that Latinas are raised differently and can tend to be more shy, perhaps even less self-confident and said,

> Women are different the way they have been raised and one of the things they need to learn is they are somebody. One thing I would say that a lot of Hispanic woman they're not sure of their own, for being themselves; they are not sure of their own feelings. They need help to accept themselves for who they are. Many Latinas lack self-esteem.

A Mexican American explained how she tried to raise her girls as Latinas saying, "I did try to raise them very Latino with the little lace collars. I wanted them to wear the little hair ribbons and how we dress up little girls. I wanted in a sense for them to be very Latina."

An interviewee brought up what she called a unwritten code one lived by that was true for Anglos but not Latinos. The Latina stated,

> The number one unwritten rule in Iowa is mow your lawn every week. Others are, "Don't show you have any money, park your car on your drive way and not in front of your house, close your garage door, no white shoes past Labor Day." They're a ton of them that Latinos need to learn;" don't hang out clothes and certain clothes have to be hidden and bring them in when they are dry. Don't leave them out forever. Don't take the trash out except on the day it is going to be picked up." Those are the unwritten rules. "Keep your house clean, keep it looking nice, not a bunch of upholstered furniture on the porch. No drinking in the front yard, no party in the front yard, everything is done in the back.." Those are the kind of unwritten rules and "no multiple families living in one house." They hate that. And that is just what Latinos do; those are the things Latinos do.
> One Mexican woman believed that people were the same; they were human.

We are all spiritual beings having a human experience. And the way we express those things are different. But the reasons are the same. The needs are the same. If we look at the core of our humanness, we are exactly the same. We laugh, cry; we are moved by pretty much the same things. We can relate to each other from our womanhood because we are grandmothers, mothers, sisters, and daughters.

Summary. Latinas living in Des Moines find much that is different for them with respect to the Anglo and Hispanic culture respectively. One difference is the Hispanic greeting of a hug and two kisses, so common between Latinas when greeting Latinos, but misunderstood by non-Latinos. Other misunderstandings came from the Latino's lack of information, i.e. not knowing what is socially acceptable, eating different food, listening to different music, having different expectations from friends. The respondents surmised that in order to understand their new culture, they would have to immerse themselves within it.

The women saw people in Des Moines as reserved, so different from the animated Latino. They also felt immersion was not so easy. The interviewees suggested that opportunities for connecting with others were needed in order to be able to understand the non-Latinos beliefs, likes, and dislikes and to help eventually developing a sense of community that is inclusive of each other. Latinos and non-Latinos need to learn and appreciate one another's cultures. The interviewees suggested that education would help dispel misinformation about each other.

A Matter of Color

The interviewees expressed incidents of discrimination that they either witnessed or had been the victim of in their adopted community. The women remembered experiences of intolerance from others who did not appreciate those different from themselves. Discrimination came from all areas in the community.

Many of the interviewees observed some form of discrimination from both the Anglo and Latino culture. A respondent concurred, "I say again, there was a lot of discrimination. You know some American people, some Anglos don't like Spanish people. They say, 'Oh those immigrants.' They look at us like we were very bad." A Central American conjectured, "Sometimes the Anglos people treat Latinos very bad. And those Latinos say, 'One day I am going to kill you.' That is the way some people think because of the discrimination." A Mexican had another issue with discrimination saying, "You are accused of looking for citizenship if you date a guy. Stuff like that makes you feel like an object instead of a human being. And you see it everyday. In the store, at work, at the phone." A Mexican mother talked about how hard it was to be in Des Moines, "Once at a hospital a doctor was rude and walked away. And one time at a store when I was buying things, the cashier shoved money at me when she saw I could not speak English." Going to a restaurant was also a place where at least one Latina believed she had been discriminated against.

> I went to a restaurant last summer where I waited and waited. Two Caucasian people got ahead of me. I was respectful and did not go there. You know I did not want to be confrontative, but the put me off and put me off, and I got out of there all upset because it was like I was there first.

Another Latina perceived that non-Latinos do not want to be with Latinos and said,

> White people do not want to socialize with us. They need to see and understand we are human being and that we have needs the same as other human beings and because they are born in the United States do not have the right to see you differently.

A Central American also added that non-Latinos in Des Moines don't have information on other cultures and don't want to. The woman said,

> The problem here is that the majority of people here don't want to learn about any other culture. I was here first. I was fine. You know, diversity was not a problem

> here. Now why do you come here and make me feel bad? And those people don't want to reach so how do we reach?

Other Latinos found discrimination issues with other minorities. A Cuban cited an example, "Fighting with Black people to get a job. There was discrimination as people do not like people from other countries having jobs." A young woman from El Salvador, whose boyfriend was black, felt blacks discriminated against her. The Latina described, "If I hang around with Black people, and I do, they talk about me. And they kinda make fun of me." A Central American, who had children of a mixed race, said she had been confronted by Latinos implying that she preferred blacks to Latinos. The mother retorted, "I fell in love with a Black man and I have mixed children, half Hispanic and half Black."

And still other interviewees were discriminated against by other Latinos. A young woman related, "Even your own people, someone who was born in the United States but their parents came from Mexico. They might discriminate against someone like my parents and call them wetbacks. So your own people, your own culture discriminates against you." Another Mexican recalled what a Latina had told her, "Go back where you come from. That's what she tells me. 'Yes you people coming here to take our work.' Never in my life was I feeling so bad. I expected that from Americans but not my own people. I felt so bad."

A Latino from Mexico felt other Latinos had discriminated against her in Des Moines. "You get discriminated by them, by Latinos, because you are not from their own circle from their society at all. You are divorced from everything. You don't have a community with Americans and you don't have a community with Latinos."

A respondent sensed that because she was from Mexico, Anglos thought that she was uneducated, "They assume you are uneducated, that you have come to take their jobs. They think you cannot understand their level. Anglos see you less than them."

Still at the same time there were respondents who had not had to deal with any acts of discrimination. A Mexican offered, "I think Iowa is a great place. I think one thing I have noticed is that no one has ever discriminated against me." A South American stated,

> I never felt discriminated against in Iowa. People wonder, though, because I went to a college that had a lot of racism. In '89 when I was there they burned my husband's friend's property. But I was Homecoming Queen. I never felt it.

A Mexican deemed that Des Moines was a good place for Latinos and said, "I appreciate people that have an interest in my people. I do not forget. This is what I love for Iowa. I can see the difference. I can see right away. I am very pleased with the people here. I feel like a human being."

Some Latinas concluded that the reason they had not had to deal with discrimination was because of the way they handled themselves. One interviewee talked about her Anglo husband and her many interracial friends explaining,

> I don't see you as in your color, who you are, or anything. I go beyond that. I am not much into determining what you are what your background is. I am accepted by many different groups of people. I don't come across as a minority or as woman. I just come across as, "Let's get to the bottom line." I stay away from race and I stay away from being a woman. That's not what I want to see, I want them to see me just for who I am not for the color of my skin or what my background is.

A Latina from Central America also offered, "I do not feel discriminated against. If you do something wrong to me it will hurt but eventually I'll forget it, put aside and keep going."

Some of the Latinas interviewed claimed they had never had to deal with discrimination but perceived that their skin, hair, and language fascinated Caucasian people. One Mexican Latina stated, "Since I've been in Iowa people are more interested in me than ever before. It's a great feeling." A woman from Nicaragua included, "The good thing about Iowa is it is not unusual when I am at church to have someone say, 'I love your accent" I used to live in California and now I feel I am at home." A professional woman from Central America said,

> You get a lot of attention. People are curious, especially if you speak the language. They wanna know how. They also don't know much about cultures and generalize they assume I am Mexican. But like I said, I like to be the center of attention. Cause you look different, cause you have an accent. And in my case I am a professional. People think, "Wow!" How did you do that?"

Nevertheless incidents of discrimination did happen to the Latinas at different times and locations such as when driving. A Mexican woman described an incident of discrimination when she was in her car,

> I made a mistake driving and cut someone off accidentally. So I thought I should apologize for myself and I rolled down the window. And the guy furiously said, "Go back to where you came from." I know I can get mad if someone were to cut me off while driving. But there again was the discrimination and the distinction because what would he holler if someone else had cut him off. What would he have said to someone white?

Other individuals found discrimination within the Anglo families into which they married. A Mexican volunteered, "I have heard comments from my mother-in-law for example when she heard that I was Mexican she told her co-workers, 'Oh those Mexican women are really mean and they're really bad; they are *brujas* or witches.'" One Latina was very close to her Anglo mother-in-law though the later was very prejudiced towards Latinos. The Central American offered, "I was really close to her and I did a lot for her. But Latinos in general she looked down on. But with me, she loved me as long as I followed the family rules. I was the person she hated to love."

Some of the interviewees suspected that if a Latina had darker skin, hair, and eyes, there was more chance she would experience discrimination. One Latina stated, "It's really about color, because the Mexican Americans who are white, have privilege, and they always have." Another respondent concluded, "You have to understand that we're always treated differently because we're of color. Anywhere we go. And that does not change." An interviewee also concluded, "I think for Anglos it is really hard to try to live around Mexicans for a while. Probably they are used to Blacks because they have lived here. And we are dark skinned and don't speak English. So that is two things against us."

Another issue for Latinos and discrimination was whether they were documented and had legal status to be in the United States. Hispanics who did not have papers deduced they could be abused with no recourse. A respondent offered,

> The people who do not understand English and have no papers are discriminated against, especially in the factories. When the people and those people know the owners know, whoever in charge the people have no papers. They make them work very hard for a period of time and then tell them there was no more job, no pay.

A few of the Latinas believed that Anglos viewed all Hispanics as undocumented and illegal aliens. A young Mexican stated, "It's like if you see a Mexican, he's illegal. Somebody asked me, 'How do you get here crossing the river.' I am like, I don't get mad but." A respondent embodied, "Sometimes when I take my lunch at work they say, 'You are the lady who crossed the river.' And it is not because I have told them; it because I am Latino. And they think every Latino crosses the river." Interviewees were upset that they were not being recognized as United States citizens. As one interviewee stated, "I AM a United States citizen." One respondent was frustrated by the fact that Anglos did not seem to recognize that there were Mexican Americans who had never lived in Mexico and had always been United States citizens. She explained,

> I was labeled as a Mexican. It's labeling. We could've, should've, and would've been American like everyone else if it were not for the color lines. The division of the little town where I grew up was really sharp. The Mexicans lived here and the Whites lived there. It was very unbelievable.

A Latina from Honduras concluded that the police discriminated against Hispanics. "The police are abusive to minorities, even Hispanics who have been here for generations. I would say teach those people that they need to treat everybody the same."

The Iowa Department of Transportation was particularly noted as an agency where Latinos were discriminated against. A respondent noted other Latinos struggling with the language when trying to get their driver's license and stated,

> I was watching some Mexicans that did not speak any English. So I asked the lady, "Do you have a lot of Hispanics?" And she said, "Ya." I was like, "What if they don't speak English?" And the lady said, "Too bad. Hope they brought a translator." That's a bad attitude.

The work environment was a place where Latinas experienced discrimination. One respondent elucidated that people who called her office for questions, did not think she was able to give them the correct answer because of her accent.

> If you give the answer that they don't like they think that you don't know. You are Latin you have a Spanish accent. You are a female. What do you know? So I have a lot of people that would call the office of child labor and they would say they'd like to talk to somebody else. I don't want to talk to the lady with the accent.

A Latina from Ecuador questioned whether or not racism was allowed at the company where she worked,

> I understand maybe racist allowed. For example I worked for this company for three months but my life is impossible. People are so cold, very cold. Any time I asked them something they don't know. No open doors. It is so difficult. I cried so much those days. I don't understand why.

When the Latina's supervisor was transferred, she was only allowed to open the mail, though the Latina had computer skills. "Again, no computer, just open the mail. For three months I have been humiliated." Another Latina was working in a restaurant when a man asked her if she could speak English, and she told him she spoke a little bit. He asked her why she was here? The respondent said, "Because I want to work. I need to work. I have more opportunity. My children live a better life here." The man became angry and told her, "If you don't speak English, and you're in my land, get out of my country."

Churches were not immune to discrimination toward Latinas. One interviewee talked about going to a Protestant church where the Sunday school teacher always told them how open they were to minorities. The interviewee explained,

> I was uncomfortable because we were the only people of color and every time I went to pick up my children from Sunday school, the Sunday school teacher wanted to make sure that I knew that he was talking about diversity. But I was like, "You don't need to impress me. Talk about God."

It was not always strangers who made Latinas unkind remarks at Latinas, it also occurred with people they knew. One Latina remembered,

> I go out a lot with friends. But there was this lady and she was a friend. She told me the other day we were talking about minorities and she said, "Well people in the office say you were really nice for being a minority." She didn't even know; she did not mean to offend me. The lady thought it was a compliment, even though you were a minority you were really nice. She did not know.

Latinas considered the Des Moines Latino population smaller than in other cities and a few interviewees expressed feeling out of place with the Caucasian majority. A Mexican stated, "I felt out of place almost basically when I came to Iowa where the majority is Caucasian versus obviously, California, where you see Latinos everywhere." A woman from South America sensed that Anglos in Des Moines had very little exposure to other people saying,

> People in Des Moines lump everybody together and to make labels and stick people in boxes. But there is a difference in culture and understanding; there are no two Latinas alike. You can't put them in a box and put a label on them and say you understand who they are. It's like saying every snowflake is the same because it is snow.

Also noted by an interviewee, "Anglos do stupid stuff too but when a Mexican does it, it just has a snowball effect and it's not fair, but it is true. And people who want to be prejudiced have a reason to be. Or if they want to be racist they have support." A respondent added to the argument claiming Anglos in Des Moines were closed minded,

> So it is really hard here because people are really closed minded. It is like you are Mexican and that's it. They don't see more than that. A Mexican is a Mexican. They don't see that I come from another culture, that I was educated, I clean my house, I go to the doctor, I have things.

One Central American added, "Currently Latinos are changing the way Des Moines thinks of us. Latinos have been stereotyped as dark hair with brown eyes. But even my sister was born with blue eyes and blonde hair."

The lack of diversity greatly disturbed one woman from Nicaragua when she first arrived in Des Moines. "When I first came here the one thing I missed a lot was there was no diversity. When my children went to school there were only two black and one Latino family." But the respondent believed Des Moines was changing and individuals from other countries were moving here. The Latina offered,

> One of the reasons why I am finally able to be in touch with myself, because there are people from other places. And I'm enjoying not only that there are other Latinos here but also there are Bosnians and there are Koreans and, you know, it is starting to feel like a real world. I come from a very diverse place. Nicaragua a little tiny country the size of Iowa. We have Blacks and Indians and a mixture of both. White, the Spaniards and Indians the *mestizo*. Jews, Germans, people from the Middle East and then we have Asians. You see the blend in every community, but you don't think of Asian/Nicaraguan or German/Nicaraguan you are Nicaraguan.

A Latina presumed there were more people moving to Des Moines from larger cities saying, "You can see that there are so many people coming to Iowa that come from larger cities where they are used to see other cultures. So they miss that and they like the new diversity here now." The Latina suggested that those from larger cities who were exposed to more diversity actually missed living around and with other cultures. People who have had to work with a variety of different people help bring more tolerance to the city. This same

Hispanic saw the younger generations in Des Moines more tolerant than older people. The interviewee explained,

> Young people are really opened minded. Middle aged people are half-and-half. I think it depends on how uptight they get. And then senior citizens, men a bit different than women because they have been to war and been to foreign countries so it is easier for them to accept. But women who are older for the rule are prejudice.

Two Latinas perceived that some Latinos expected to get special treatment because they were Hispanic. One from Central America said,

> The Latino community has a chip on their shoulder. They can't go through life like everyone else. If I do my job I should get promoted because I did my job. They want to be promoted because they are Latino. But it is what all Latinos expect, special treatment. But it should be because you worked hard.

The other South American deemed Latinas had an attitude and stated,

> I didn't come to this country with an attitude that everybody has to come to me and pamper me. I want to know that I can make a difference. And that the only thing I need is an opportunity to prove myself. And I can be like everybody else. But if you come with an attitude that I want to go there to find something exactly like in my country and cry because you are not in your country. You shouldn't come here with attitude.

A Central American also explained that there was a mix of issues living as a minority in a majority culture including reverse discrimination. The woman offered, "I've never used my gender, my age, or my race to apply for a position. To you know expect special treatment. And you know there are situations where I could have." The interviewee added,

> I guess the racism I experienced was interesting. I got rewarded for being more like white people. You know people appreciated the fact that I can learn their language so well and I look like them, I dress like them. I just you know don't challenge their stereotype, I don't challenge their expectations. But you know I am Hispanic and I have the ability to speak Spanish and I know the culture but I don't really challenge their views of family. I think a lot of people when you say "Hispanic" they stereotype the east L.A. Hispanics. People who work in the fields or the people who work at the meat packing or the pig thing. We are not all alike. I think the role of the Hispanic is changing. There is still a lot of discrimination and people still get treated poorly because they look different; it is out there.

A Guatemalan deemed that there was resentment by people in Des Moines towards Latinos and added to the argument saying,

> I think a lot of people in Des Moines are beginning to feel a little threatened because the Hispanics are getting organized. I think the Latina role, now they are more organized, is to ease that. I mean we were here to contribute and to make this community stronger not to weaken it. But there is a lot of resentment out there. You know it was kinda of like the African American culture. You know they worked hard to get there and now they are not and there is a lot of reverse racism. From the Latino to Anglo. To a certain extent you know it just like are having power so okay we're going to get back.

A Nicaraguan woman talked about how people stared at her with a disapproving look, "Some things happen to me because I am a Latina and I notice when I talk people give me a punishment look." The interviewee also found people were feeling threatened by the increase in the number of Latinos who had moved to the area stating,

> I felt that as a society it was in our best interest to help everyone else. We benefit by it. But it does enter my mind there is someone who will be angry. And they don't have a problem showing it. They also feel okay you are Latino, you should be poor. Or you, Latino people are taking over. You know and it is a threat. There are people that don't like Latinos.

Several other Latinas concurred with her when she said, "Some people in Des Moines do not like Latinos."

There was a feeling that other immigrants, such as the Bosnian and Sudanese, were given preference and more assistance in becoming United States citizens. One woman questioned,

> You know what Latino people are sad about here in Iowa? Bosnian people are told that they could be a citizen after being here a year: they are offered this and they are very proud. They and the Sudanese they may need help and they will go and use their food stamps to buy food. They are happy that they're here and they are proud people. They don't have to feel bad. They need the help when they get here. But a Latino person will have their head down if they have to use food stamps; they see at as a hand out. There is a problem with that. Latinos should be treated as everyone else is.

Latinas were fearful for their children and the abuse they encountered because they were Hispanic. Several talked about the discussions they had with their children and, "their right to stand up for themselves." A Central American stated,

> I am doing something that sometimes don't accept. And maybe it was wrong that I say it to my children. But I tell them your are very smart kids and very beautiful. Yet you do have to exceed in how much work you do and how good you do it because we are different. Because we're unique. I push my daughter a lot. I don't mean to hurt her feelings. But I feel you do have to do twice as much work because people expect you to have less quality of work. You have to do twice as better.

One Latina mentioned that one of her stepchildren had darker skin remarking, "One time she was crying because she has dark skin." The Latina tried to comfort the child and help her not to worry.

A few respondents discussed how the media, TV in particular, presented a negative stereotype of Hispanics. A woman explained,

> It's just so wrong what the media was showing. The TV just shows that we are illegals, or crying, or lost, or just the criminal side. Just the bad sides always with diversity. Why? I did not grow up like this. For me discrimination is new. I never had it before.

The anti-immigration commercials being shown at the time of the interviews upset a couple of Latinas. One respondent stated, "The anti-immigration ad made me sick to my stomach." A Mexican woman became frustrated with the anti-immigration ad's premise and retorted,

> The immigrant does not speak our language and does not understand our culture. And you say what culture? The real culture was the Indians. And the real language was the Indians. Because I studied this country in my citizenship classes. The United States colonies were first occupied by Spain and then French from all over the world. So why are these people ignorant.

A young Mexican mother talked about how foreign the issue of discrimination felt and how she didn't understand it. The respondent allegorized,

> In my country discrimination does not exist, so you start seeing race here. Blacks on one side and Mexican on another. They describe you as what race are you? For me that is hard to understand. Why? If you say Negro for them is an insult, but if you say Negro in Spanish it is just a color.

A Central American woman worried about how some Latinos would react in the future as they became more exposed to continued discrimination and what their breaking point would be. The Latina stated,

> There is a lot of discrimination. Some American people, some Anglos do not like Spanish people. In my country the people that come here not because they want to sell drugs here it is because they want to work. People change here. The culture the way they are treated. They feel bad. And I know many, many people who come here to work and support their families. People who are alone. They leave their families. They leave their children. And come here and don't receive good treatment from Anglos people it is hard. They are coming angry and they want to do bad things.

The respondent suspected that some of the Latinos turned to drugs and crime because they were always put down and poor. The interviewee stated that these people, "Come here to work; they leave their families, their children. They have no support and they become angry because of the treatment they receive." The interviewee believed that non-Latinos needed to learn how to treat Hispanics as people.

There were Latinas who also talked about people in the community who had gone out of their way to help them. A Mexican allegorized,

> I remember one of my first experiences at the laundry mat. I did not know how to operate the washing machine, and there was a neighbor. She just knew me from passing by and that was it. She did not speak a word of Spanish; I did not speak a word of English.
> Somehow she explained to me how to use the washing machine, and I was so thankful.
> Another Latino told how her car broke down and was helped by Anglos. My car broke down outside my school and this other teacher lend me her car to go to the store to buy antifreeze and put it in my car, and another teacher helped me to get it started. I could not tell them how thankful I was.

And yet another act of kindness came from strangers who offered clothing to a Latina and her family. The woman tells,

> We did not have clothing for the wintertime and we saw a big garbage sack outside our door but we did not know who it was for. It was there for about ten days. Finally we open it and we realize that it had clothing for us. It was not new but it was our sizes.

One woman expressed frustration with Hispanics who conveniently would be Hispanic at one time and then claim to be American when convenient. The interviewee offered, "This group was separate. Sometimes they are not Spanish and when convenient is Mexican is Spanish. But when was not convenient was American." The respondent believed, "You never forget where you came from; you never forget your language or culture. Take the good from here, learn it, but do not forget."

> One interviewee was trying to turn discrimination into a positive for herself saying, Just like the myth that I'm not that great for this community or that if I speak Spanish for two minutes I'm offending someone, when I am not talking to them to begin with. That makes me bigger and better. So it's not such a bad thing after all because anytime there is an attack on who I am as a Latina woman then I want to get better.

Another interviewee said, "We're here; we're not going anywhere. We treat you with respect. Treat us with respect too. We're here to make it a better place." A Latina mentioned that she was brown, not white or black, "I enjoy being brown and I think I joke about I; it's like a tactful way to remind them to be more aware and I am not a threat. I don't look Hispanic. I can just remind them I am brown, and I am no threat to their community." The Latina was adamant that there should be education for people about each other saying,

> It was important to deal with fear and ignorance. Get information out and stop trying to be so correct about it. Racism was going to happen so let's deal with it. Embrace diversity but strive for equity, I don't strive for equality, but I demand equity education would be a bridge for that.

The respondent questioned what education was needed to make a difference asking,

> And what type of education do you want? I mean when we talk about culture, how many educated people do we have among the Hispanic culture in itself? How many people have read the literature from their own country, explaining their political turmoil or their own culture? We use culture as a very loose term. What does it really mean? What is Hispanic? Do we redefine it as culture? I am Guatemalan before Hispanic.

Another Mexican hated being called brown saying, "I like to be called my name like a human being, not because of my color."

A Mexican woman expressed her thoughts on discrimination saying,

> We are invisible in this town. And it is part because the whole community wants us to be invisible, but in part we also want to be invisible. And do you know why? Because racism is very alive in this country. If I am not seen, I am not going to be the subject of discrimination, so we are worried in instances to be seen. That's why we don't go out. Unfortunately the whole community members are expecting us to go out to you, because we are somehow expected to set the pace of the journey in which we are going to get to know each other. But we are afraid, terribly afraid. Because the times that we have done so, we have been rejected or attacked, or judged, or criticized in a negative way. So we stopped doing it.

Another interviewee talked about not being accepted and that Latinas can not assimilate when the dominate culture puts up barriers against Latinos. The woman states,

> We are not accepted. How can you demand from a population to be assimilated when they are not accepted? The assimilation cannot occur when you are not accepted even if the person was to assimilate. So there's no way. Don't demand from us to assimilate into this culture when I am not accepted. You know the affirmative action program? Well they are just giving handouts to all these people. And I say don't give me anything. Just don't stop me. Don't put barriers up to me. Don't give me anything. I will do it myself, but don't stop me. So we need to demand the integrity of our dignity because we are human beings that have abilities. We are looked at as just as problems. We are perceived as problems. Our talents, our gifts, our skills--the ones we bring with us here are not recognized, are not valued, are not used, and are wasted. What a waste.

A Mexican feels that Latinos have to be better than Anglos in every aspect of life in Des Moines just to survive. This Latinas felt Hispanic were constantly judged, the woman and said,

> To be a Latina in Des Moines you need to be twice as smart, work twice as hard, be twice as loving, twice as forgiving. You need to do everything perfectly because you are judged constantly. You are asked for things from everyone. The demands on you are huge from everyone. And you have little or no support. Uh one of the reasons many of us end up being depressed and becoming suicidal is because you reach a point in which you have nothing more to give. Nothing. I have been at this point in which I was cold, absolutely cold inside, because you have come to this country to get your family together and you cannot keep your family together because you have worked too hard to be a family. To learn English, to learn the ways of this country. Because you just try to explain your story that you are not here to take away anything from anyone. But we are perceived as robbing this country of something. And here we are, you know, trying to work hard and to be good citizens and to obey the laws and to be decent people but we are not accepted. We might speak English but we have an accent. We might pay our taxes, but still we are welfare recipients. We might try to celebrate together with other people but we are watched like if we are strange animals coming from outer space. And it is hard then I wonder why did I come. Was it worth it? I don't know. Yes, we may have a nice car to drive, we have a roof over our head and we have food to eat, but at what cost? The cost is way too high. Had I known what we were going to go through, I would rather be poor in my own country. Because the discrimination and the racism those are wounds that never heal. There are acts of kindness you might feel good but it doesn't make me forget all the many times that we have been yelled at because we speak Spanish or the embarrassment of my children because I have an accent, or the time my husband wouldn't talk because he has an annoying accent or because he has a darker skin color. Or the times I have been told that I cannot be Mexican because I am not wearing braids on my head or *huaraches* on my feet. No. I don't know, if that is a fair statement. I don't know that I actually provided a better life to my children.

An interviewee expressed that she wants to learn about the people in her community and offers,

> I want to become educated about the rest of the community experience. What it means for you to have Latino neighbors. What it means to have this wave of foreign-born people coming to your town. How did you feel about it? Straight from your heart. I want to understand you. I want to become your friends but we are not given the opportunity.

Finally, an interviewee believes that non-Latinos are afraid to look beyond the color of the skin of someone because they might find out that they are the same. The Latina explains saying,

> We want to be blind to the other person's feelings because they do not look like us on the outside. And we don't want to look in the inside because we might realize that

> that person is exactly the same as we are. And we would be aware that we have not treated them the same.

A respondent summed up her ideas and emotions about discrimination saying,

> I have asked so many people what it means to be an American. What the American culture is all about and nobody can tell me. I think it would be awesome to send all the people born in this country to live for six months in another country. And I am sure that racism would end.

Summary. The Latinas sensed that Des Moines needed to adopt more diversity training, and other opportunities for exposure to other cultures and peoples. The Latinas were sorrowful that some individual talents and skills got shelved because the community did not know how to interact or tolerate different peoples. Many Latinos feared a future where they believed Latinos will eventually act out in retaliation for countless acts of discrimination. Many of the interviewees themselves had been subjected to discrimination and intolerance and the subject was painful. There were other Latinas who believed they personally had never experienced an incident of abuse but all suspected that Latinos were targeted for racism.

Chapter 10

FINDINGS: GETTING HERE AND FINDING A WAY TO STAY

The Latinas described how they arrived in the United States, dealt with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and made the decision of whether or not to become permanent residents.

The Border

Many of the interviewees shared their stories of getting into the United States and their process of assessing whether or not to change their status to legal residency and stay in the United States or return to their country of origin.

The Latinas talked about their respective experiences in crossing the border. These experiences were varied, with some respondents walking, floating, or flying into the United States.

The border was defined as the Mexican-United States border. Although many of the Latinas came from different countries other than Mexico, it was that border that defined their experience, except for the interviewees from Cuba. Most of the Latinas, documented or undocumented, had crossed the border on more than one occasion. How Latinas crossed the border into the United States often reflected how their lives might be in the United States. For example, if the respondent crossed the border into the United States undocumented and on foot, it indicated she had very little money and very little English skills. If the Latina came by plane, even if with very limited means, she was documented and probably had some assistance upon arrival in the United States.

The experience of crossing into the United States varied significantly from respondent to respondent. Respondents coming to the United States with documents usually had very little to say about the actual experience, they simply came into the United States. Furthermore, not all Latinas discussed their border crossing. An interviewee reflected, "The border crossing is not an issue. When I first came to the United States I came on a student visa."

Still crossing the border for the undocumented Latina was a critical experience, full of peril, abuse, and often painful memories. An interviewee offered,

> Before we cross, the guide he tell, if somebody go we don't save you. Nobody going to take care of you. You gonna die. If you wanna die, die here. If you can swim is good for you, but if you can't is very bad.

Interviewees talked about mistreatment, cost, and risk when attempting to come across the border. A Latina stated, "I remember the *coyote*. He's very mad; he was waiting on the other side. He said very bad words to me. My heart at this time, I have never felt so scared."

Many of the respondents risked their lives or at the very least, risked being caught and sent back to Mexico or their former country to cross the border. One interviewee was caught crossing the border and deported. The Central American offered, "I was deported and sent to a detention center for six weeks."

The known risks were not a deterrent for Latinos coming to the United States. One of the respondents stated, "Trying to stop Latino immigrants from coming to the United States is like trying to cover the sun with your thumb; it is impossible." Several other Latinas agreed saying the United States government could not stop the flow of Latino immigrants into the United States. A Latina added, "Our community is growing. The immigration people coming from these Latin countries, the Spanish people, they never gonna stop the immigrant from these countries." A Mexican stated, "The U.S. government can't stop Mexicans from coming here to improve their futures." A respondent added,

> I don't believe in boundaries; to me they are stupid. What boundaries are there for the birds that migrate to the south in the winter? What boundaries are there for them when they come back? What boundaries are there for the rivers? We are apart of life, why are we stopped? I don't understand it. So when you are talking about citizenship to me. I am thinking of citizenship of the world. I am a citizen of the world--of planet earth. I am not a citizen of Mexico or the United States. As far as I know we are of the human race.

Summary. Crossing the United States Mexican border as an illegal alien is fraught with danger and risk. There were a few interviewees who talked about how they had crossed the border undocumented, sometimes with the help of a *coyote* (a person who for a fee assists undocumented Latinos cross the border) and sometimes independently. A certain number of the women floated on a tube, others walked Some crossed alone, others with friends or relatives. The Latinas faced such dangers as physical abuse and robbery upon crossing.

Not all the Latinas came across the border undocumented some flew into the U.S. with a legal document, perhaps not the right document, but legal enough to gain entry. Yet other Latinas always had the proper documentation and were never at any risk of being picked up by border patrol or deported.

The INS

One of the other momentous experiences for the interviewees was dealing with immigration issues, particular treatment by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.The laws on immigration have changed frequently over the years, so depending on when the Latinas came to the United States and what was current law at the time determined how long and what was entailed in their citizenship process. The women had different scenarios of what was required of them in order to gain entry or to get a Visa into the United States. Another immigration issue was how to understand what the laws actually said and what immigrants legally could do. A Mexican stated,

> Thank God my husband had been employed by these dual national companies and the reasons he moved back to Mexico were employment related. He did not lose his legal permanent residence but unfortunately, like many, many other immigrants, he didn't know that he could have petitioned for us all these years before.

Some of the Latinas were misinformed or did not understand the current law. A Latina related, "We don't know what happened but we became illegal. So they gave us an order of deportation and a lawyer fought and fought. For six years we were in limbo."

Finding resources and assistance with immigration was not an easy or inexpensive task for Latinas. There were few resources available to help them answer questions on immigration, but not enough, and most immigration issues required hiring an attorney.

Some of Latinas interviewed had helped other Hispanics with immigration. A South American offered, "I know a lot of immigration. I work with our church helping these young people where they have papers or they don't have their papers."

Another factor that influenced the immigration process was the political climate towards immigrants at the time of their application. Whether the United States government had strict immigration laws or quotas also affected how the immigration process proceeded for respondents. An example was when an El Salvadoran was in the process of immigration and there was an amnesty program. The Latin explained, "They had that amnesty. That's when we put our papers through in' 87."

A Mexican also said, "My family took me to the Social Security Administration to get a Social Security number that was not good for employment. That was 1989. I think now they're probably not giving that kind of Social Security number."

An El Salvadoran offered, "I am desperate. I want to get papers. I want to live here." A translator for the interview explained the law at the time,

> If she was making a case to be here with a family member then she could probably do it. But now they've changed the laws so that even if you have a way to be here permanently, they were still saying you have to apply feom your country of origin. You cannot apply from the United States. You used to be able to apply from here and pay a fee but no more.

The interviewee lived with an abusive boyfriend and when asked if she would marry him in order to get her documents she stated, "No. But hopefully I'll be somebody. But every time I get a lawyer it's like I have to be married they tell me or I have to wait some more years. A family tried to adopt me but I was a year older than I was supposed to be."

How the INS treats people who were in the United States illegally was also a topic of discussion. A woman expressed her concerns, "Because they were illegal, they just grab people and send them back without asking questions, when they have a family up here. The way they treat them. They are human beings; they are not animals."

The issue of a husband being deported and unable to contact his family raised concerns. Not only did the immigrant's family not know the whereabouts of the man, they would be without support because of his deportation.

Though the interview questions did not directly ask the Latinas how they came to the United States or whether or not they had documents, many wanted to tell their stories. The interviewees wanted to tell how they crossed the border and their experiences with the INS. Each Latina had her own, very personal story of the immigration process. Some of the

Latinas did not have any problems and experienced a timely immigration while others were treated poorly and the process took years. A few respondents talked about the fact that once they started the immigration process they could not leave the United States to visit family or friends for a period of years. A couple of interviewees never again saw their parents alive after starting the immigration process. One Latina was particularly bitter about not being able to see her mother during her illness or attend her funeral. The Latina offered,

> At the time I was struggling between taking the risk of going back . . . hiding from the INS and going back illegally, but then I was thinking, " well, what about my children if I leave the process? They are going to deport me and then we are going to be separated for God know how long" and ultimately I made the decision to stay with my children just to make sure but we're not going to be separated. But the cost of that decision to this day does not leave me, to this day.

The experiences and trials the interviewees endured varied, but the decision to cross the border or apply for documentation that allowed residency in the United States was never easy or simple.

Summary. The interviewees shared their individual stories of working with the INS. Not all of the Latinas had applied for citizenship but most had had to deal with the INS for some reason or another and wanted to tell about it. The respondents saw the INS as a necessary evil, few had positive things to say of the experience and many had been frustrated and angered by the lengthy process. The interviewees had been humiliated and their patience tested by the documentation process. Many of the problems the Latinas had in working with the INS was due to incorrect and lack of information. Latinas would be told to have certain forms completed and then later told that they needed additional forms.

The rules of the INS are ever changing, and it is difficult and expensive to stay current. There were few places for the respondents to find quick, correct information without hiring a lawyer. The Latinas found very little assistance with respect to the citizenship process. However, there were a few Latinas whose documentation experience was very simple and easy; they don't know why but dealing with INS was not an issue.

Immigration

A Cuban arrived in the United States by plane at a time when she and her family had no other options but to vacate her country. The interviewee related how she felt when she was leaving her country,

> When we went to the airport you go around eight in the morning and you leave around five. They have to have time to search everybody. We finally got onto the plane and it was very mixed emotions. I cry a lot first you are happy, you're leaving your country, you're going to a free country. But then I knew this would be the last time I would ever see Cuba.

Another issue for the Cuban was a passport that was not up todate, when they had to leave Cuba. The Latina relates,

> We are given a penalty because we had a passport that was almost due so we have fifteen days to stay in this country. We are not illegals but we are nobody, because we have this penalty. So we are nothing. So we became legal. You have to leave the country. Now days they don't have to, but then you did. And we did not have any money to fly the family to Mexico or to any other country. So we had moved to Minnesota we drove to Canada. Spend one day at the Embassy there. Go through all the papers the doctors again and by the afternoon, we have our green cards so we were permanent residents and legal in this country.

The Latina had received some minimal assistance from the United States in order to get restarted in their new country. For this woman the difficulty in immigrating was not so much the coming to the United States as it was the forced leaving of her country. The Latina has become a citizen of the United States.

And yet another Mexican woman was able to drive across the border to the United States. The first time she came with a student Visa, traveling with her grandparents, and then much later she came with her husband who was a United States citizen. The interviewee explained,

> My grandparents moved to the United States in the 50s. I came to live with them and had no issue crossing the border. But I started living the American way and I got pregnant. Got married at a very young age. Therefore I became a resident alien through my husband at that time. So that opened the doors even though my mother was an American citizen by naturalization because of her father. My parents come from border towns, even though I was born down in Mexico City, there was family on both sides of the border. So my mom she was working my way into the country to become a resident alien.

This interviewee has become a citizen of the United States.

A woman from Honduras first came to the United States with a student Visa but explained,

> The second time I came on a tourist Visa and I overstayed that Visa. And then I married someone from my country who was a citizen, for the purpose of getting my documentation. We got an annulment before thirty days because he really was not going to help. He was not working. So my citizenship did not come about that way. So I fled to California where I figured I would melt in out there.

The Latina returned to help friends in Des Moines and in the process fell in love with an American, went back to Honduras, and married him. Because the respondent had overstayed her tourist Visa, she could not come back to the United States for a period of several years. The woman decided to go to Canada and cross the Canadian/ U.S. border. The interviewee continued to explain,

> My ex-husband was supposed to meet me but his drug addiction got in the way and he was turned around at the border. He was supposed to meet me and did not show up. I was running out of money so I just said, " what the hell? I'm gonna jump on a bus use my Iowa driver's license and say I am an United States citizen." That was a felony. I went to jail and was deported back to Honduras and my new husband joined me. I became pregnant shortly afterwards. After a certain length of time, I was able to get a waiver and was able to come back legally.

Being married to a United States citizen and having children, the Latina was able to get a waiver in the late '80s and come into the United States. The Central American was in the process of becoming a United States citizen.

A Mexican came to visit a friend on a tourist Visa and stayed for five years. The Mexican related her story,

> Me and my son we just came her for vacation to visit my friend who became my husband. I call my mom and say, " Well, I think I'm gonna stay." We were supposed to go back to Mexico and get married. But he say, Why don't you stay and we'll see how your son can like it." And we did. I went home for the first time in five years this summer. I went back because my husband has decided to become a citizen. That way we can get our papers. I began my citizenship, residency. I never have to go through any troubles to get any kind of papers for my son or me. Nothing. I mean my husband he have to go here and go there. And he was deported like two or three times. And I just got my son green card like a month ago and we went back to Mexico and I got his passport. I just got his Social Security card. I mean everything. A lot of people go through struggles I am very lucky.

The Latina received a permanent Visa for her and her son and could apply for United States citizenship.

The first time an older Latina crossed the U.S. border she had no problems; crossing the border at that time was much simpler she explained.

> The first time no problem. Go the bridge and then go to the United States. And I cross for three months. Only need to show how much money you have and what kind of job you do in Mexico and my husband had a very good job, in the furniture store. And I did not like it here.

The Hispanic had come to the United States planning only to stay temporarily so she did not worry about documentation. The Mexican relates,

> My husband had a Social Security number but was not legal. In this time no problem you send your birth certificate and everything and the questions they ask and the information they needed. There was no problem nobody ask nothing. But I don't worry I am not going to stay.

The respondent and her husband were able to get Social Security cards that allowed them to work but did not provide a Visa to stay. After three years her husband decided to return to Mexico but she could not go because she was not legal, she did not have the correct documents. Then the interviewee's father died and she needed to return to Mexico. The woman had three children and had been in the United States for some time, but her husband did not want her to return to Mexico. She threatened to call the INS and tell them they were living in the United States illegally. The Latina remembered the incident saying, "I'll go to immigration and tell them we have no papers. They will send us back. He was scared." The couple hired an attorney and were told to go to the Embassy in Monterey, Mexico, to finish the paper work. Unfortunately, the women found out her husband had married another woman though he was already married to her, which created another problem. She still could not get any documentation because of the legal issue with her husband. The situation resulted in her inability to legally return to the United States. The interviewee continued, "The lawyer so mad. He said, 'We can't take care of the papers because according to Iowa law, you not married anymore to this woman.' It was a terrible experience I still needed help. Cause I still don't have papers." The respondent crossed the border into the United States in a truck, riding with a friend and pretending to be his wife. The man's real wife was a resident of the United States. The Latina had no problems at the border.

The Latina did not know now if she wanted to become a citizen of the U.S. or return and stay permanently in Mexico where her mother had some property. The Mexican explained, "If you an American citizen you cannot have property in Mexico." The Latina's daughter told her not to worry and that she would marry an American citizen to help her, but the Latina did not allow it. The Latina clarified,

> I remember she tell me, "Mama you no need to do this if you no want it." So it was a terrible time. My daughter tell me, "Don't worry I will marry an American citizen. I can take care of the papers." I say, "No because one day he will go and tell you, 'Oh you married me only for the papers.' You will marry legal as a citizen and I will become a citizen too." I convince my husband that he need to be a citizen as well, so the three of us become citizens.

An undocumented Mexican came to the United States without any problems. The Latina offered, "I came with a Visa. I am a social worker in Mexico and it was easy to obtain a Visa. I just have a tourist Visa." The interviewee had overstayed her Visa but under the current law at that time she could not apply for citizenship without returning to Mexico. At the time of the interview she could not become a citizen while in the United States. Because the respondent had overstayed her Visa she probably would be penalized and have to wait a prescribed number of years in order to return to the United States once she went back to Mexico.

A documented Latina from Mexico came to the United States and was misinformed by her husband about the process of becoming a United States citizen. The husband thought he had a permanent legal residency and he didn't. The Latina related,

> I came as a tourist. The reason I came was because he told me and he lied to me actually. He told me it was going to take six months for me to have my document. He knew otherwise. He had received a letter from immigration lawyer here in town saying it would take anywhere from four to five years for me to get my documents. Even though he had been a legal permanent resident for over fifteen years, he needed to have physical presence and didn't for at least four years. Even though he had been coming back and forth, it was not continued presence in the United States, so he couldn't become a citizen in order for us to shorten the time to obtain legal permanent resident for my children and I. Had I known I would not of come.

The husband did not know that he could have petitioned for his wife and children to receive a permanent resident Visa prior to coming to the U.S. This status would have allowed them to travel back and forth between Mexico and the United States. As a result, this Latina who had come on a tourist Visa could not leave the United States for five years when she initially applied for permanent residency. The Latina would be under penalty of having to start the process all over again or be deported or, at best, have to wait another five years to apply for reentry back into the United States if she left the United States. The woman was unable to return to Mexico and visit her family. During this time her mother became ill and died. The woman exclaimed, "That experience of having a loved one die and you not being able to hold them for one last time. I do not wish it for even my worst enemy."

A young Latina had come to the United States on a tourist Visa and then decided to come back again and study in the United States. The respondent applied for a student Visa, which took a year to get, and then had to return to a border town to finish her paperwork although she was in Des Moines. The process for getting the Visa had been very frustrating. The interviewee said,

> They ask you for one thing and then when you come back, they ask you for another thing and then when you have those things, they say it was not valid. You have to certify it, you have to go and get a notary to do this. It took forever. Why can't they ask for it all at once? Why do you have to spend a whole year doing it? The INS, they are mean. They are mean like you are missing a paper you have to go here; no you have to go and renew your passport. After all this process when they asked me again and my passport was expired. So I have to go to Chicago and renew my passport. Why didn't they get the paper work when my passport had not expired? I had to start the process all over.

An undocumented Latina from Mexico tried three times to cross the border. The first two tries were within a month of one another. The first time she was caught and turned back. The second time she was able to get through with no problems but the people she was going with were caught so she turned herself in. She did not know what else to do. The third time the Latina explained, "I came in a bus and I just passed. I crossed at Tijuana. There I crossed walking; that's all. Then a car stopped and picked me up. My children were passed through the border by a cousin in a car."

A woman from Central America asked for a Visa from her country of origin and related her story.

> I applied for a Visa and they don't give me. I make the decision to come to the U.S. anyway and decide to come here by Mexico. So I save a lot of tips. I have a friend in

> my country; they know somebody in Mexico. He try and find me this man. He ask his brother and I get everything telephone address. I cross at Ciudad Juarez. But I fly to because I get help in getting a Mexican Visa to go to Mexico. It was easier for me than some people. I go from my country to D.F. in a plane, and D.F. to Chihuahua, in a plane. From Chihuahua to Ciudad Juarez by train. There the *coyote* was waiting.

A *coyote* refers to a Mexican smuggler, middleman, or go between who escorts undocumented immigrants into the United States from Mexico for a fee. The Latina spoke about mistreatment and abuse, getting very little food, paying a large amount of money to the smuggler, fearing robbery, and having near death experience from drowning when relaying her border crossing. experience. The interviewee elucidated,

> In Juarez we have to wait one month. They say, "You have to wait the situation was not good" But was not true. He knows we have money. He take us to a house in a basement. Sometimes they don't go and get us food, but they ask if we have money. And say, "Okay you need food. It will cost you twenty dollars." He knows we have money. So he wants more than we had to pay so everyday he ask us for twenty dollars for food. And they don't buy very much food only for one day, and for three weeks they don't come. And I worry because there are children nine and five. We don't have nothing.

The Latina related that she found a way out of the house to get food and was caught by the *coyote* who then moved her to another house for a week. The *coyote* then took her and others to cross the river. The Latina remembered,

> The night we cross we walk like ten miles to the river and it was deep and I cannot swim. They make us take off our pants. I am the only woman; the rest are men. And I think, these man can do with me whatever they wanna do and nobody's gonna know. I have a bag with my good clothes in so I only have one hand. They have a tire tube and they throw it in the river and I did not have time to get a good hold and in the middle of the river I start to fall off and the man next to me pulled me back on. When we get to the other side we have to run and when we get to a freeway we can only go a few at a time to get across. When it was my turn, the coyote tries to take my clothes off me looking for more money and as I get loose and run across the highway this car starts honking; he almost hit me. I was so scared. A truck comes then and picks us up. There were six girls and a man and we were in the back. I want to go to Miami but the truck is going to California and we were in the back for twenty-four hours. At first it was very hot and he will not stop to let us "pi pi." Then the driver stops to sleep and we were so cold. When the driver woke up he said he will get us food but you cannot go to the bathroom. He stops at a gas station and washes the car and we were so hot

> we feel so terrible. We think we were going to die. He does not get us food. I remember one of the woman, she gave me a pampers to make "pi pi." But I can't, I don't know. We arrive in California the next day and I am sick but I have help from others peoples' friends. They take me and give me food.

The interviewee was able to get documentation to stay in the United States because of the amnesty program during President Ronald Reagan's term. The amnesty program was for people who worked in the fields and farms. The Latina explained,

> The program for people who work in the fields and I apply and they don't check. Five years later I get my green card and three years ago I became a citizen. For me the INS was very easy. I just live here two years illegal. I am very lucky. A friend from Bolivia who live here sixteen years she does not have anything, no Social Security number, she don't have nothing.

A Mexican who was documented rendered her border crossing and immigration. The woman describes her crossing,

> The first time we came to this country we are five persons--two couples and a woman. We crossed the river, which was deep, and I was very afraid. My husband carried me and I lost my shoe. I was pregnant three months with my first child and very sick. After we crossed we walked for a half-hour to El Paso Texas. There we went to a house that helped us and slept. The *coyote* guiding us knew the people. One of the ladies of the house gave me shoes but they were too big and I felt people were going to know they were not mine. I was nervous. The lady of the house the next day bought us bus tickets to Chicago for the next day. On the way to Chicago when we arrived in St. Louis *la migar,* the border police came on and asked us for papers, identification and we had nothing no paper at all. The women were separated from the men and went to El Paso and the men were sent to Mexico. We supposed to be sent back to Juarez but there was confusion. We just got off in El Paso. We rented a hotel and waited for the men for three days to come back but they did not. One of the ladies with us was able to call her husband in Chicago and someone came and got us. I was so sick and was not supposed to travel but what could I do. Fifteen days later my husband came to Chicago to his brother's house.

The Mexican goes on to tell how she had gave birth to her daughter in the United States, but the current laws required that she and her husband return to Mexico because she had delivered a child in the United States.

> Then I had my daughter in the U.S. and at that time there was a law where you could not stay in the United State if you had a child born there. We could not be residents at

> that time. In Chicago we went to immigration to fill out the application to become legal. My husband had also become very sick so we go back to Mexico for two years and make the application to become legal. We had a lawyer in charge of our papers and we were notified when we could return.

A 15-year-old undocumented Latina hitchhiked for six days from El Salvador to Tijuana, Mexico with an Aunt. The interviewee described her travels,

> It was easy for me. We asked for rides. We kept asking for rides and got them, it took us six days to get the U.S. We ran across the border at Tijuana. We did not have a guide. We ran and we walked for one day. My shoes were wet and I was tired of walking. My feet were hurting because of the water; we had to swim the river. We could not stop. Every time we saw a police car we ran. Like I did not know if it was immigration or not. We ran up a hill and I was short of breath.

A Guatemalan came to the United States when she was thirteen, with her mother and stepfather, and moved to Lawrence, Kansas. The Latina had gone to college in the United States, married an American, and was expecting a baby. The interviewee had a permanent Visa but had not applied for citizenship explaining,

> I've always felt so lucky to be able to stay in this country. You know I don't dearly admire it just for being the United States. I recognize it has limitations and issues, but I respect it. You know it was like when you were wearing a sweater that somebody lends you, you were always going to respect and that's how I feel about it. You know, I'm still not a citizen. That's just laziness because I've been a resident for a while and I just need to do the paper work. I don't like going to the INS. It's just horrible. You know I have three more years to renew my residency or obtain citizenship. I have a green card. The INS is a worthless hassle. People who are power hungry. You know, if you dealt with some of the level of people that they deal with everyday, it'd be hard to keep a smile, provide good service. You're dealing with a language barrier; you're dealing with a lot of people who are ignorant about the rules and regulations and the fees. But they're dealing with a lack of resources to inform these people. I don't hate them but I don't appreciate them.

A woman from Mexico arrived with a student Visa and married an American. The man later became abusive and then she had problems with immigration. The interviewee allegorized,

> I am coming from a culture who never worried about if being illegal or not. For me it was really hard. I am legal here and I can go to work, school but I understand now

> why they don't go to school it was so hard. I mean immigration was just a huge door that it get into your heart because you learn how to say no or to say yes to many things that you never thought. You get questioned if you were a prostitute and you plan to have how many guys so they can pay you. That was written in the forms you know. If you're on a social program. Have you been here? What freedom you have had? In order to come here you have to be perfect. You cannot leave, my case was very different. My husband left me and was abusive. I had to file through a violence act for women It was really hard. I have to show many things I have to write down affidavit of intimate things that are very personal but I had to do it. The government gains into your feelings that it should not. You know you are human not another piece of the game the puzzle. So I think it is really non-human. I had to leave my humanity in order to be perfect so I could stay. And second after I got it, I cannot be eligible for scholarship, any kind of loans from the government. Because you are not a citizen you have to have a co-signer. You're talking about your status; it was nothing. I got approved to stay in the country. It is just that I have to wait another year in order to have my interview and that is it and I will become a permanent resident. Right now I am conditional. But even if I become an American citizen, I don't lose my Mexican, because the Mexican constitution say that you cannot lose your citizenship.

The respondent complained about the medical exam for citizenship, saying it is expensive and immigrants have to wait months to see the only doctor who does this work. The Mexican complains,

> When I was fighting for immigration, you have to have a medical exam and you can go to just one doctor in Des Moines. The doctor was very picky like, "Whenever I can see you, I will see you." Like they were making a favor; it's their job. We have to have a report signed from them saying we were healthy, and it can take two months. But you need to start working and you don't have it, you cannot. And you cannot use your insurance to pay for the exam it; has to be cash and it was $300.00. That's a lot of money.

A Hispanic Central American, who was a U.S. citizen, depicted her immigration process to the United States,

> I left Nicaragua two years before I got married. I had lived overseas for a while and then came to the United States to visit on a tourist Visa. The second time I knew I was coming to get married. So the first time I came to visit and the second to get married. But I had to go back to my country because I had lived outside of my country for more than a year. This is U.S. requirement. They needed at that time to do a heavy-duty background check, like if I had been a prostitute. I mean all kinds of weird things. It took six months and they put you on a list. My husband was so upset for waiting six months "big shots" and it turned around in two weeks.

A Latina from South America was one of four in her church who had documents to stay in the United States. The respondent was very concerned for Latinas who did not have papers and helped those she could. The interviewee considered what had happened with immigration in the United States was wrong saying,

> I know a lot about immigration. I was working over there in my church helping young people, whether they have papers or they don't have papers. Ninety nine percent of my people from the church they can't afford it. In my opinion, it's almost impossible. The American people can do anything with immigration and the people coming here now to the north don't have papers. The majority was illegal. Suddenly, I am crazy how to help the people. That is the part that I believe is impossible, cause remember two years ago the law changed the lives of people.

A Latina from Argentina and her husband both had student Visas the first time they entered the United States. The respondent talked about returning to the United States, "We had to go home because we had an obligation to Argentina because my husband was on scholarship and lived there for 12 years. We came here nine years ago to live permanently. I mean with a green card and everything." It took two years to get a work permit once she returned to the United States. The Latina believed,

> We need a clearinghouse, we need a center, and some place for answers and help people short cut. In my case it was different because there was a special Visa for executives. My husband is an executive in the same company in Argentina and is making a transfer within the same company. So he was already legal to work. But it took us awhile to get a green card--two years. I mean I was legal but I could not work. I was lucky my husband was working. What do you do if you come as a family from another place and you need to eat?

A Mexican who did not speak any English was in the process of getting documented for a permanent Visa. The Latina was here because her husband had an accident that left him in a wheel chair, paralyzed. The Latina allegorized,

> We met a person who has helped us a lot. We have been able to take care of our documents because they have helped a lot. The problem that I want to take care of is to earn enough money so we can report enough income in our taxes so we can be approved with our petition with immigration. We come here and we have no clue

> about anything; it would be nice to have some kind of orientation. Because there are people who come with no documents and they cannot work. Sometimes they come with other people and ask for hospitality and they don't get it. Sometime people will help in the beginning and after a couple of months they don't want them any longer. And sometimes you feel bad and really uncomfortable living in somebody's place and that person does not welcome you any longer; it was hard. As you may know my husband receives income from the government because of his accident. And it was hard because he was the only one who qualifies to receive these benefits. We cannot be included as his family members and that was hard. For example, he was offered to have assistance with housing but because he was the only one who qualified, we couldn't go with him we decided not to accept it. That was the way it was according to immigration status. We do not qualify because we do not have yet our legal permanent residence. Recently we got some papers but it was not finished. In the past he was receiving some food stamps and they were taken a way because of immigration status. Our person has helped a lot given us an orientation and helped with our immigration papers we can only thank them so much.

A Central American first came to the United States as a foreign exchange student with a student Visa and returned after a year. A few years later, the El Salvadoran and her husband decided to leave El Salvador, because of the war. They applied for a multiple Visa, good for five years, and were granted one. The woman felt very lucky because it soon became very difficult to get any Visa for the United States from El Salvador. The Latina perceived working with the INS was another issue. The respondent demonstrated,

> I am so glad we're citizens and have nothing to do with immigration anymore. Cause that was the worst nightmare you can go through. I only had one problem with immigration because when we came we came in '81 and our permit ended '80 in November. So my lawyer was putting all the papers through. Somehow they either got lost. We don't know what happened but we became illegal. So they gave us an order of deportation and a lawyer fought and fought for six years we were in limbo. Can you imagine that? Until they had that amnesty. That's when our papers came through in '87. They put our passports right when we went up there and the man horrible. I don't have words to describe him. He was mean, plain mean. We were applying for political asylum and it never came through. They never gave it to us. Sometimes they would leave us alone for two years and then another citation would come. One time they sent us to Chicago. We had nothing to do with Chicago. They were just negative just do things to you that make you afraid. Our lawyer said to the judge that he didn't know why if were not from that district. The judge became quite angry with the INS officer in charge of their process, wasting their and his time. My daughter became a citizen just last year because of all the paperwork you have to do. She was practically a citizen when we became one. We became citizens first, don't

> ask me why. I think it was the stupidest thing because I sent her paperwork at the same time I sent ours and they sent a notice back saying we had to become citizens first and then ask for your daughter.

A Peruvian came as a foreign exchange student on a student Visa first and then came back again for college. This Latina married a Hispanic whose Mother was a United States citizen, so she was able to apply for her permanent resident card and received it with no problems. The woman didn't experience many problems with the immigration process stating,

> It was no big deal for us. I didn't have any problems. They interview you at the time but I was not asked any questions. They just gave me a green card. But I guess that so many people pay to marry a United States citizen and have all the paperwork, they can suspect something, but in my case they did not. The fees are high now. I think it is like $300 for all the paperwork for United States citizenship.

The Latina brought up getting her Social Security card, which was an unusual process.

> I had a bank account when I was an exchange student, and the bank required a Social Security to open the account. So my family took me to the Social Security Administration to get a Social Security number, but the Social Security card was not valid for employment. I have the legal number to do all the paperwork for banking and all that but it was not valid for employment.

The Latina had obtained her green card and could apply for citizenship in the United States. The woman helped other Latinas become citizens by volunteering to fill out papers and translate the citizenship test because the English skills of the group were not good.

A respondent married to an Anglo believed she had had no problems at all with the immigration experience saying, "I did not have any problems from the very first time. I think when you go through immigration coming into the United States it is the way they see you that is the way they treat you. If you appear to be secure you will not have any problems." The interviewee had come with a tourist Visa and ended up getting married. The woman had wanted to get married in Mexico but to do so would have taken a year before she could acquire proper documentation so they married in the United States. The Latina processed her documentation in Omaha and had very few questions asked of her. The respondent observed that the way one looks had a big impact on how one was treated saying, "I think usually everything was about appearance. I think when you go through immigration and are coming to the States, it is the way they see you, is the way they treat you." The Latina had permanent legal status.

A woman from Central America was able to come with a resident Visa. The interviewee offered,

> I got a resident Visa; my parents got it for me so I came as a resident. When I came I was already legal." The respondent went on to explain her citizenship process. "Then when I got married, at the time you only needed to be here for three years without leaving the country to become a United States citizen. So after three years I was going back home and I said this was it and decided since I was going to stay I might as well become an U.S. citizen. That way I don't have the problems of the passports coming and going to Nicaragua. So I did, even though I lost my Nicaraguan citizenship. You don't renounce it so it's like I feel as much Nicaraguan as I did before.

A Latina from Mexico wondered how Latinos were supposed to go about finding information for staying in the United States. Still others interviewed saw a definite need for an agency that would help with the immigration process. One frustrated Latina agonized over the dilemma that plagued Latinos who attempt to immigrate to the U.S.

> How does a person get a Visa? What are the duties of those who have a Visa or are classified as a resident alien, a non-citizen? How do you become a citizen? What is the punishment of illegal entry? What is a Social Security number, when do you use it and why? How do you get a Social Security card? Can you go to school if you don't have one? What is the difference between a misdemeanor and felony? What do you do if you get arrested how does the legal system work? What are your rights as a resident alien? What do you do with your papers as an immigrant? How do you get a lawyer or can you get a lawyer? What rights do you have as an illegal immigrant? What rights do you have as an immigrant? What do you do if your are going to be deported? How are family members contacted if one of your family is deported and where are they taken?

A young Mexican talked about the process of working with the INS speaking about the rules for becoming a citizen. This Latina expressed the need for citizenship classes to address the steps needed to become a citizen and asked,

> How do you address the lack of resources to help these people become citizens? What do you do if that person was undocumented and already in the United States and wanted to become a citizen? How were dilemmas resolved like the need to leave the United States to help an ailing parent or the funeral of one? Could you leave the United States and, if so, how did you get permission, knowing you were not to leave the country, once you started the process to become a citizen?

The issue of obtaining a Social Security number came up multiple times. A young woman from El Salvador who was undocumented wanted to go to school, work, find health care, and drive but she could not do so legally without a legal Social Security number.

A Latina deemed that Hispanics working with the INS needed advocates who knew the process and could help Latinos. The laws changed constantly and there needed to be individuals who had current information with regard to U.S. laws and Latino rights. For example special arrangements for quick Visas had been enacted for those countries that were affected by Hurricane Mitch. Also abused wives could get additional assistance with their immigration. Legal help was also an issue as it often took the expertise of a lawyer to get immigration issues resolved. Many Latinos could not, however, afford such help.

Summary. Becoming a citizen of the United States was not an easy task for the interviewees; it took time, an understanding of how to apply, money, and a strong desire to be a U. S. citizen. The laws were constantly changing, as was the emotional climate of people within the United States towards immigrants and immigration. The Latinas found no central location for information or answers about immigration procedures and misinformation abounded. The INS was not an easy agency to work with and seemed to be understaffed. Most Latinas who worked with the INS had very few positive comments. The Hispanic community had shown an immense amount of strength, fortitude, cleverness, and patience to immigrate to the United States, and once here, those same people had to call on those same attributes, and more, in order to stay.

Chapter 11

FINDINGS: LIFE IN THE HYPHEN

The Latinas told their own unique stories about what it was like trying to make a life in Des Moines. They described the obstacles they overcame, their dreams for the future, the impact they had made on the community, and what was needed to help future Latinas acclimate to the United States.

So Totally Alone, Totally

Feelings of being isolated, of not having anyone to relate to, affected almost all the interviewees and were usually most evident within the first few years of living in the United States. The Latinas were separated from their family and friends, those who cared about their well being. The women found themselves thrust into new, unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile surroundings with very little support.

Respondents discussed the issues of isolation and loneliness. One of the reasons for these feelings was being a minority in Iowa. Respondents noted that there were so few minorities, that they immediately felt out of place. A Mexican stated, "I felt out of place when I came to Iowa where the majority was Caucasian versus California where you see Latinos everywhere." The perception by Latinas that Des Moines community lacked diversity was repeated several times as a cause for feeling isolated. One Latina stated, "I was like from another planet. And it took awhile to trust people and not to be scared because I did not know if the relationships would last. I was used to my friends from all of my life." A woman from Central America commented, "I missed a lot, there was no diversity here. No one to relate to."

Winter weather contributed to feelings of isolation. Individuals were not used to the cold temperatures and having to stay inside for long periods of time, limiting their contact with others. The Latinas came from warmer climates and had constant contact with their neighbors. One respondent remembered saying, "I didn't know anybody, I wasn't working and you did not see anyone in the streets cause it was winter. The car would not move, so it was extremely hard getting adjusted." Another Latina stated, "Maybe because of the weather too. Every day in Mexico City the weather permits outdoor activity like swimming, the park." Another Latina lamented, "I don't like the weather." Not having their respective families nearby contributed to the Latinos feelings of isolation. A Latina stated, "I miss right now, I miss my family because I am alone." Another commented , "The reality is that when we arrived here we felt sad because we are very lonely. We have no family, neither friends."

The first few years of being in the United States were mentioned as being the hardest, when respondents felt most isolated. A Latina stated, "It was hard. The first years because of the culture plus the fact I was by myself." Coming here alone, adjusting to the culture, having no one to relate to, having no money, and simply missing their country all factored into feelings of isolation. One individual stated, "At times I feel depressed, sad with problems because you don't know any one, at times I feel like crying but I don't." And one individual said, "I right away lose weight here, the food the language or maybe because I feeling so lonely." A woman from Central America said, "In the beginning it was hard because I didn't have any friends." The culture in Des Moines also added to those feelings of aloneness. A woman related, "The differences from my country to here is isolation. I mean the people here are very reserved." Another Latina said, "I'm living with two Americans and I can tell you we are so different."

The size of the city was also mentioned as an issue for isolation. A young Peruvian from the city of Lima considered Des Moines small with fewer people and less life.

Not relating to other Latinas living in Des Moines was also an issue for a couple of the respondents. A Latina stated, "It's really hard because again I am totally divorced from my community." The Latina continued by saying how hard it was to get into the Anglo world.. "It's so painful for a Hispanic to come home and go to bed." The Latina implied that she did not have any connections like family and friends to talk to. An Ecuadorian said, "I am very smart but I still I cannot find my niche not yet." The Latina related that other Ecuadorians in Des Moines drank but she did not, which left her uninvolved with the community.

Another respondent observed that Latinas who had been in Des Moines for several years were too American and looked upon her as a foreigner. The respondent stated, "But there were Latinas that were American. You know what I mean." Another remembered the time when she wanted to talk to her neighbor who looked Spanish. The Latina had asked if the woman spoke Spanish and the woman stated, "I understand a little bit but I am American. I cannot help you why do you come here? Do you have papers?" The Latina went on to say how she later wanted to talk to a new neighbor who also looked Hispanic, but was afraid and was so lonely.

The inability to speak English was mentioned many times as a reason for isolation. One woman said, "It felt bad since you don't speak the language." A woman from Mexico talked about being alone in the hospital having a baby and no one understanding her. The woman's husband had compounded the issue by not coming to the hospital. The Latina explained, "My husband only leave me there and get off but he did not have a job. No one stayed with me. I felt lost. What will happen here? No one understands me here? Oh it was terrible. I start to cry."

A Central American explained, "I was happy with my former job because I would meet people, speak more English. In the house I clean now; nobody's there. And I don't have any one to speak to."

Not having someone to speak to in their native tongue was also an issue of isolation for Latinos. One Latina explained, "I've been with woman who cannot drive, cannot go anywhere and have no ability to talk to anybody else in their language."

Other individuals cited abusive husbands and boyfriends who added to the loneliness. A boyfriend of a woman from Central America did not want her to be with or talk to other Hispanics, though he was from Puerto Rico. The Latina stated, "He was a drug addict and we lived together for seven years and I was isolated from the Hispanic community."

Yet the opposite was true for another Latina and her Anglo boyfriend. The woman stated, "I like him and his family a lot. It's good you know. He changed a lot of things. And now it's like I like here more than before."

For one Mexican woman, it was her husband who took her children away and left her totally alone. The interviewee stated, "He would take them sometime anyhow and I would be alone at home. Absolutely alone. I mean as alone as you can be. There were no other Hispanics in the apartment complex where I lived. I couldn't communicate with anyone." Another Latina had an Anglo husband who went through the phone book looking for Spanish names so his wife could speak to someone who could become a friend. The Latina remembered,

> When I first came my husband would look in the phone book for Latino names and call people so I would meet people, Latinas. The only Latinos here were Latinos that had been here for a few generations and a lot of them did not speak Spanish. But my husband wanted to give me a connection.

A young Latina from Mexico talked about being here for the holidays and how lonely she felt saying, “Sometimes you know for the holidays I’d feel like an emptiness. You know like I’m not whole.”

The inability to drive or have access to a car was a strong determinant for isolation. Not being able to drive prohibited Latinas from getting together with others with whom they related, going to the store, being employed, or just getting out of the house. One woman from Mexico, who did not drive, baby-sat for her daughter which only made her more isolated.

Another Mexican was supposed to have the use of a car in Des Moines but her sister-law arrived in Des Moines first and took the auto.

An interviewee mentioned that the Catholic Church they had chosen to attend did not welcome them, and this added to her feelings of being lonely and isolated. The Latina stated, “At the beginning we went, of course, to the Catholic Church because we were raised Catholic. We thought it was important to start making connections in our church here, but we were not welcomed.” Contrarily, another Latina from Cuba stated it was the fact she was Catholic that helped her make friends.

The feelings of isolation and loneliness did contribute to some of the Latinas wanting to help other new Latinas into the community. One Latina volunteered at schools where she could help new immigrant families with children. It provided a place where she could speak Spanish and relate to people like herself. A woman from Mexico talked about her loneliness and stated, "That was why now I try to help the people coming here. I don't care where they were from. I was so lonely." Another Latina had the desire to help other Latinas saying, "I wish I can share with other women. Because if I can change the life of one woman for the better, if I can empower one woman, I will be happy. I will think that it was worth it to go through all the pain I have gone through."

Two Latinas coped with isolation by joining social clubs, such as Toastmasters, held in Spanish where they were able to make friends, both Anglo and Hispanic. A Latina stated, "I am still in Toastmasters. I try to always improve my English in social clubs and I am with my friends. You know that makes me busy; it's a way for me to not worry about being so lonely in this country."

A Mexican woman who learned to become assertive gave an impassioned talk about learning how to play what she called, "the Anglo game" saying,

> I would educate myself and I would become very assertive. I know it's very hard. I wasn't assertive. Every time I would open my mouth I would be shaking inside. But I would do it because I love my children and they were the biggest motivation for me to learn how to play the game. Because I wanted them to be able to know how to play the game themselves. If we don't do it, our husbands or parents, they are not going to do it because they are busy just working. The role they have in mind of being the provider does not allow for this in their growing. We need to do in order to not to be accepted here because probably we won't ever be accepted, but at least to have a better chance. A better chance to be less isolated.

A Hispanic talked about how the Latino community was split into factions and this had also created loneliness. This Latina's job required her to work with all Latinos but not become friends with any, for fear of creating conflict. The Latina explained

> I didn't socialize a lot with other Latinos or anybody because when I first came here I understood what this job was gonna take and it meant to stay neutral. I didn't make friends socially with anybody to go out and do things. So it has been really lonely. Terribly lonely.

How to address the isolation that Latinas experienced in their new society was another topic. The respondents wondered how to locate and help Hispanic woman who had no transportation, no help with their children, and could not speak English. One Mexican offered, "The earlier a Latina learns English the better off she will be and less isolated." Another woman mentioned, "Having Latinas get together to share their experiences with each other, especially those who have been here for longer times. Find out what the perceptions and realities are about being an immigrant in Des Moines." Another idea presented by interviewees was providing self-esteem classes for Latinas. An interviewee explained,

> Coming here is a big shock because there is a different culture. And they feel that they cannot fit because they feel that they're not going to be able to do it. They're afraid, "what if this doesn't work?" Or they don't try and it plays on their self-esteem.

Summary. The respondents discussed their feelings of isolation as immigrants and how prevalent these feelings were for new immigrants. Many Latinas came to the U.S. alone or with their spouses and found no one to connect with. The interviewees believed that making a niche in Des Moines was quite hard and being able to make connections with others took time. The Latinas in this study deemed that if they were not going to be isolated or lonely they would have to make an effort to change. The interviewees had to step outside of what they knew as culture norms. The respondents would have to immerse themselves into what was unfamiliar with very little or no help. There was no systematic support or outreach from either Latinos or the community to help Latinas deal with emotional, psychological, or social issues.

I Think I'm Happy

There were Latinas who found living in Des Moines a wonderful experience and others an unpleasant encounter. A few interviewees were blissfully happy and others miserable. Sometimes circumstances surrounding the Latinas influenced how they felt about Des Moines and other times it was the Latina's attitude. The Latina could have both global and personal issues that factored into how successful an individual was able to become in Des Moines. Getting the right job, a decent place to live, having other family members join you, knowing the language, understanding the culture, getting an education, having a support mechanism in place, as well as attitude and luck, were all important pieces of the puzzle.

The interviewees discussed unique ways, they discovered, to make living in Des Moines a successful experience. There were interviewees who explained, "I like everything." A Hispanic offered, "I made it the day I arrived." A Latina stated,

> I think we made it here since we got together. We were fine. We were just fine. I say to my mother-in-law who came for two months when my daughter was born, I want you to know how we are really doing. You feel we are so free here, we are just fine. I mean we have everything we can.

A woman from South America answered, "I think I have made it."

The answers to success included getting a good job and/or being able to buy a house. A woman from South America explained, "I made it when I knew I will come to work and feel comfortable. You do your job and you make a difference. I meet a lot of people in the company and I'm there and I'm doing a good job and I am compensated for it." Another interviewee presented "First of all I got this really good job." A Central American added, "To own my home makes me feel like I made it. Even if I don't have the job I dream. Buying a home to me was like hey, I'm here." A Mexican stated, "I was here two years and we bought a house. That was a big thing." A Central American concluded, "When we bought our home I felt at home."

For other Latinas in Des Moines personal growth was measured in terms of surviving divorce, overcoming challenges, or being accepted by different people. A Mexican collaborated,

> I think when I got my divorce because I went through many problems. And I saw that I was not in Mexico and my mom was here with me and I had my whole family and even if they were far away I was fine. I think that's when I said, "You can do it." And I have done it.

Another interviewee believed she has found so many people who have accepted her and expressed, "I've adapted well. I've been embraced by many people. I've been fortunate to have been accepted by so many people from all background, all races. I am thrilled to live in this country."

One other Latina had grown but it was a painful process. She states,

> I have grown as a human being, as a woman, as mother, as wife, as a daughter, and as a sister, because I have been challenged every step of the way and it has been a painful journey very, very painful. But I thank God for these experiences because I am a better human being thanks to that. I can see you as a human being and not see an Anglo woman any more. I see the human being.

The respondents had different circumstances which contributed to their feelings of success. An interviewee married to an Anglo stated, "Being able to fit into my husband's family was a big change. Being accepted and accepting their culture too. Another thing was the willingness of people to try and help." Another Latina explained that having her entire family come to the United States from Ecuador signified that she had been successful saying, "The most wonderful thing happened in my life; my dream was to bring all my family." A woman from South America mentioned, "It was certainly the job but when you have a group of friends that you can get together yes. I think right now I am happy in Des Moines." Another respondent mentioned her children and their success in school, stating, "I'm very proud of my daughter. I am very happy. I have what I want." Another Latina answered that what had worked for her in Des Moines was "Being friendly, open, curious, and an absorber of anything that was good for me."

Yet there were others who did not feel successful and offered, "I don't know if I have made it in Des Moines. I'm not where I want to be." And another interviewee added, "I don't feel I have made it here." Many interviewees, both rich and poor, also perceived that they had not made it in Des Moines, were not successful, and did not feel they belonged.

The issue of failure was, at times, personal and, at others, more global. Some interviewees concluded that they needed to have their children complete school, or learn English before they felt good about living in Des Moines. For others it was finding a place to live, and still others, a place to belong. One respondent felt disconnected to people saying, "I cannot reach people sometimes. You take for granted living in your own country. People for example enjoy talking about things you don't." However, for a Mexican to feel successful, it is, "When we would have our residence, when I would know English, and that my children would be in a higher education." A professional Latina talked about her career as having been a failure explaining, "I've worked very hard and I've been rewarded but yet I am not where I want to be because sometimes I am very blunt and honest. I don't pretend to be as political as I should at times." The interviewee concluded, "I'm very fortunate. I mean we just moved to this house; things are great. But I always want more." A Mexican stated that she will feel successful when, "I'm working and my children are doing well in school." A second Central American concluded, "Last year was a bad year. When I first got pregnant it was not good. I don't have no place of my own to live, no job, no documents." A Hispanic woman stated, "The quality of life was not good yet and the language is very hard. It is very difficult. The most difficult part is the communication. That is what you need in order to do everything."

Several interviewees mentioned issues that were out of their control such as weather or air traffic. A respondent claimed, "We complain about the winter." A Latina added, "The weather, the snow." Another Hispanic mentioned, "We wish Iowa were a closer state to Mexico that we could travel to Mexico easier. Air traffic is the pits here. Trying to get flights."

Interviewees who were new to Des Moines were careful not to offend or be ungracious towards their new host country. A Latina who did not speak English, or have documents, or a job, stated, "In Mexico I got sick and I could not always get treatment for the problem. I did not have the money. The only thing here that does not work is I don't speak English." The Latina has much she could complain about but does not to the interviewer, she was reluctant to say anything negative about her life.

A few of the Latinas wanted to discuss both failures and successes in their transition from native countries. An interviewee, who had a home, husband, and children, who were doing well in school, said she was happy but wanted to leave and go back to her former country because the lifestyle fit her better and she missed family. A Mexican explained,

> I want to go back to Mexico. I like the lifestyle here. I like the way the children are growing up here. I do miss my family a lot. Yes I would like to go back. But the money it's really hard to live in Mexico.

A Mexican, whose husband worked, children were in school or had graduated, and who owned a house, traveled to Mexico for several months every winter to a second house she owned, exclaimed, "I want to move back to Mexico to live. The Latinas then comment that they are content in Des Moines but are still Latino and miss the life they had in their former country. Many dreamed of going back.

Summary. The interviewees who found success in Des Moines had good jobs, a decent place to live, children doing well, and their spouses employed. Nevertheless many still felt like failure. For Latinas success was measured in terms of a personal achievement. There were respondents who had overcome language barriers and cultural differences to become happy, productive individuals, in their new country, while other respondents were fearful and upset at having left former lives and did not know how to start over in a new country. Finally, there was not much in Des Moines as far as support or help for those Latinas who needed assistance in making a home here.

You Don't Dance Here

What the respondents felt about living in Des Moines was often indicative of their plans to stay. How the woman viewed their circumstances and the support group around her influenced how they felt about living in Des Moines. The Latinas found non-Latinos to be less emotional, less engaged in a social life, and in fact, more boring then Hispanics. Hispanics, on the other hand, believed themselves to be more exciting, more outgoing, and more enthusiastic about life. There were interviewees also concerned about the lack of diversity in Des Moines. However, the respondents also viewed Des Moines as a safe, quiet, and warm environment in which to live.

The lack of diversity was noted by an interviewee who assumed that there were not many Latinos in Des Moines. The interviewee commented,

> In California you see people out there all the time selling things with their little carts and selling tamales, selling corn on the cob. Here you don't see anybody. No vendors no commotion. Ya know people here just work; they go home or do their thing with their kids; it's quiet at night after they get home.

A Latina from Central America added, "You don't dance here." Another respondent related, "But people here in Des Moines I know there's not that bubbly excitement that I know Latinos are about. We're a little more spicy. I feel people in the Midwest are a little bit more laid back, just not that exciting." A Latina added, "People here are very reserved." A woman from Mexico concluded,

> Here everything seems to be more solemn. Here is so boring, so absolutely boring. We don't have anyone to party with. We had a little party with our neighbors also from Mexico. We were singing and dancing, playing music and all the neighbors were looking out their windows at our home and we were wondering what in the heck we were doing getting so much attention. We were disrupting these solemn peaceful times of our neighbors we better be quiet.

A respondent remarked there was no feeling of community around her and said,

> There is no sense of community. You know what I mean? In my country when you build a sense of community, there's a lot of emotion. There's a lot more feeling. Des Moines is reserved. Here there's a lack of commitment to friendships or just interacting with people.

Another Mexican assumed Des Moines offered very little for her to engage in and stated, "There's nothing socially here for me, for fun."

Nevertheless, there were Latinas who believed differently, than those quoted above. These Latinas felt there was a real sense of family in Des Moines. A Latina said, "My life is very nice; my life has been really good in Des Moines. I love it here." An interviewee stated, "People are nice. I think there is a great sense of family." A respondent from Mexico remarked, "Here everything is close, clean, and the people are nice. I like Des Moines a lot." A respondent, who likes living in Des Moines included, "Here the standard of living and cost of living are lower are bearable and lower." A Mexican added, "Cause when I came here I can see the people are different. Very friendly. And I can see that they see me as a human being. Not by my language or color." A Guatemalan expressed,

> That here time goes more slower. You have time to do what you want. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to live in Des Moines. It is a safe city, not too large. You can get better pay and a good place to educate my children. I am happy to live here, especially for my children. We have more opportunity to have a good life.

A Mother from Mexico asserted, "It is a city where you have the benefits of a city but the benefits of a small town." Another Latina noticed, "Families are together here." A respondent related,

> All my family have come over from Ecuador, and everybody is okay. I don't care if they are a success or not. But at least they have something to eat, whatever they want. They own a residence; they have rights. The new generation, they will be somebody.

A Mexican exclaimed, "Here we have more opportunity to have a good life including raising kids, homes, and our marriage. Here is better pay." A respondent explained, "Unemployment is almost none in Des Moines and Iowa is a state that's number one in education. It is safe to raise a family." A Hispanic voiced, "We like Des Moines very much. It is very quiet. Quieter than Chicago and more opportunities to work." Another interviewee offered, "I like the lifestyle here. I like the way my children are growing up."

A Latina from Peru commented on the traffic, "There is no wait everything is so close. But traveling by plane is more difficult and harder to get to Peru." The Latina included that traveling from the Des Moines airport was expensive and took much longer.

An interviewee who has made Des Moines home remarked why she and her husband were still in Des Moines, though they had planned to leave.

> We always said we are never gonna stay in Des Moines. We are gonna move. But things happen, ya know. You stay. You get a job. You start comparing. We've been in Tempe. We did not like it. It was too hot. Then in California. No, too busy. So you start comparing, and you say, yeah this is a good city, especially if you have kids see all those mini-vans outside. This is the mini-van nation, Iowa. Someday we're going to have a family. I think it is a good place to raise children. The best schools and all those mini-vans. I wouldn't say I'm never going to have a mini-van, never say never.

An interviewee who was raising a family agreed that Des Moines was a good place for families adding, "Because it was safe, there was a lack of drug crime compared to other cities, good education, it was quiet, decent salaries, and all the things that matter."

Another Latina explained that it was a great place to be Latino saying, "Being a Latino in Des Moines just means that there are more opportunities for me to contribute."

A Mexican woman talked about the things in Des Moines that she liked and considered the city a good place to live saying,

> Child care facilities support for single woman. It's an easy life to do things. In Mexico salaries are lower. You can do more things here economically. Here the law will protect you from domestic violence; in Mexico no. Here traffic laws are enforced. The childcare in Des Moines and that single Mothers can get help and support.

The Latina also believed salaries were good in the area and added that there were laws to protect citizens from violence. "Here laws were enforced," the woman stated.

Still the interviewees noted the lack of contact with other cultures by many of the people of Des Moines. "People don't travel from Des Moines," was a comment spoken by a Latina. One respondent said, "One of things that amazed me when I came here was people that had never left the State of Iowa." A woman also questioned,

> You're telling me you've lived all your life here never going anywhere? And I think that was the narrowness, of the people not accepting other cultures because they have never been anywhere with infiltration and the getting to know someone of a different background and getting to see that they were actually religious people, knowledgeable people with their faults here and there.

Another respondent added, "There is a lack of awareness here, people are wasteful." A Mexican supported, "Most people that I've known in Iowa have not traveled beyond its borders. They live in a small world. We contribute by spicing things up culturally and financially we are hard working people." A Mexican concluded, "People are really ignorant about where I come from."

A respondent deemed that because people in Des Moines did not know other cultures, they felt overwhelmed by the number of Latinos moving to the area. The interviewee states

> I think a lot of people in Des Moines are beginning to feel a little threatened by Hispanics. You know Hispanics are getting organized, oh my god what are we going to do? I think we have a role to ease that.

A Hispanic added by saying,

> The problem is that the majority of people don't want anything to do with educating themselves about Latinos. I was here first. I was fine. You know, diversity wasn't a problem here. Now, " Why do you come here to make me feel bad?"

A respondent observed Des Moines had preconceived ideas about Latinos remarking, "Usually it is that I don't fit where I should. I'm a Latina so I should be poor. And if you're not poor, how did you get here?" A Honduran observed that Latinos were not valued here but highly marketable saying, "It becomes a "catch 22" because you can get a job and the cost of living is lower but you are not valued."

Summary. The Latinas offered both negative and positive attributes for living in Des Moines. The interviewees assumed people were less apt to party all night but would help you paint your house; there was less crime in Des Moines but a lack of diversity. Des Moines also had less competition for jobs and salaries were good; however, people had less culture and were not exciting. Des Moines was hard to travel from but did not have congestion and traffic. The main reason a Latina chose to stay in Des Moines was usually because pieces of her life fell into place here such as a finding a husband, job, or the kids doing well in school.

Las Esperanzas y Suenos (Hopes and dreams)

Many of the hopes and dreams of the interviewees were similar to hopes and dreams of any mother, wife, daughter, or sister, but there were some respondents who only wanted better English skills, adequate shelter, and the ability to care for their children. Other Latinas, however, dreamt of going back home to where they felt more comfortable, to be back with family and friends and all that was familiar. And then there were interviewees who wanted to be recognized, counted as a person, and to be seen as a Latina.

The interviewees discuss their dreams. One Latina stated, "My hopes? To be able to provide my kids a good education. To have a secure life and not be working at the age of eighty because I did not save money. To be able to maintain a good life. Money, security." Another Latina stated, "That my children have a profession. I want to work. I don't want my children to live in poverty."

An older Latina from Cuba said, "I am really happy with what I'm doing. I'm very proud that I'm making a decent living at my age. I just dream I want to live longer."

Another Latina said she was already blessed, "I really felt blessed. I have a husband who kisses the ground I walk on. My children have turned out. I have been truly blessed." The Latina who owned a business added, "I don't have the monetary worth others have but life is good."

A young Latina wanted credibility and to be heard saying,

> I've had a different background but I don't feel heard and I think that's why I fight so hard to get credibility for working hard. And I think that just having you sit down and ask me these questions was just such a wonderful experience because you've heard and someone was interested. And I've seen that change with the changing interest in the Latin American community. We're finally being heard.

A Hispanic stated, "My dreams. I would like to own a business. I would like to go to school so I feel good about myself. My hardest problem right now, I need to be able to speak English and Spanish really well. I would like to do that." A respondent would like to open up a factory, "I wanna have a factory for making dresses here in Des Moines. Why not?"

Another interviewee wanted to see that Latinos were paid what they were worth.. The woman said,

> I want to get all the Hispanics who work Des Moines and get them out of the company and then retrain them and put those skills and tell corporate Des Moines, "You want them now, you gotta pay for them, and I'll give them to you. If not, go out to Chicago and get someone who is going to cost you twice as more."

A Mexican wanted to be a leader saying, "My goals are expanding my knowledge and developing myself as a leader. I like to take people in the right direction to become leaders themselves."

A Mexican wanted to be able to help Latinas in the future as a lawyer, "To assist them at a higher level." The woman added, "I would like to start a family, with an American, with an American because now I see all the things that I didn't know and I cannot go back."

A Latina from Mexico wished that, "Basically my hopes and dreams are that my children can make a better future here because we have nothing to offer them." The Latina hoped her children would study because that was their only hope, to get an education. She also dreamt that her husband would work again.

A Central American stated, "I want to be able to learn from everything that I can to succeed. I very much want the American Dream and you know I feel like I have it right now but I still want a new house."

A Latina and her husband had a dream to put a mission together to help needy Latino immigrants who had moved to Des Moines explaining,

> What we want to do is start a place they can be, where somebody can teach them something, like to be a carpenter to get knowledge about work or something. And after this he can do, go to find job and take care of himself. Our mission is to teach others to learn to do something. And teach English and to help others help those who are on drugs. Or to help those who are alone here. Try to help him to first see how they can live better here. Try to teach them so they can have a better job.

Other Latinas also wanted to help other Latinos. As a woman from Ecuador stated, "I want the opportunity to serve people." A woman from Peru added,

> I would like to find something in more like human service type of social science. My long dream is to work for the United Nations someday. But I think there's a lot of things to do in Des Moines for Latinos, and it is going to grow.

Another Latina wanted to see more Latinas attending college. The interviewee believed it was not enough to graduate from high school but that more Latinos must go on to higher education. The woman said, "There's a lot of women that don't have even an undergraduate degree; they are just out working. They feel comfortable. Latinas marry young and I would like to see that change. See them go to college and have a family." A woman also requested, "Finish my school because I would like to have a degree. My dreams could be to get help, to get English, to speak English."

A young mother stated, "I want the opportunity to be involved in my children's life to have the freedom to do that. I would like to be wiser with dealing with people and learn to pick my battles better."

An interviewee desired, "I would like to have a family. Travel more. I really love to travel. There's so many countries and so many cultures I would like to learn."

A respondent wanted to see, bilingual children in Iowa and said, "I think language, the development of language skills for little children. Iowa could be the model for the rest of the country."

A respondent wanted to see her children receive a good education and that as a Latina be recognized as a contributor to the Des Moines area. The woman elucidated,

> My dreams are that I'll have my children through school with good future for them. I don't think I will be able to give them much. But a good education I would love that. That would be one of my dreams. And hoping that people get to know who we are and not to stereotype us. That's my main thing as a Latino because I have a lot of pride of everything. Of my country and who I am. And that's what I wanna be recognized. You go everywhere and you're proud to be an American and that's the feeling I have too.

A Mexican asked, "I would like to have an evening job so I can take care of my children. Basically my dreams and hopes are that my children can make a better future here because we do not have anything to offer them."

A respondent whose husband is ill requested, "I would like my husband to get well and to be able to work again."

Other respondents wanted to return to their native homes. A Mexican stated, "I want to go back to my country." And another added, "I would like to go back to Mexico this year. I don't have a future here."

Summary. The future for the interviewees offered a great deal that was worthwhile and at other times, very little worth. All the respondents dreamed of a better life--a good life. The women desired a life where their children grew strong, were educated and prospered. The women dreamt of owning homes and businesses. There were those who wished to be able to speak better English and also converse in Spanish. Finally, the interviewees dreamed of finding a sense of belonging, of finding their niche in country in which they lived. However, some interviewees had given up hope and were making plans to return to their former country. The Latinas could not find a way to make Des Moines feel like it would ever be home and were tired of struggling.

We Provide Good Food

The contributions of Latinas to Des Moines affected the entire community positively by bringing new foods, music, dance, and a different way of looking at life. The interviewees added to the work force, payrolls, taxes, and were. The Latinas added skills, talents, and ideas to Des Moines.

However, the Des Moines community has to find a way to reap and harvest the new skills and talents that the Latina brings with her and not let these talents go to waste because of a language barrier. The Latinas also articulated needs and requests, i.e. more bilingual translators, and more access to services. As with any new group of people there were also individuals who added to the crime and violence of the community.

A comment made by a couple of interviewees was that Latinos brought cultural diversity and richness to Des Moines. Latinos enhanced the diversity of Des Moines because of the multiple cultures within the Latino community; they did not bring in one culture, but many. A Hispanic explained, "There is diversity within our race in our culture. And there are things to learn from our culture." An interviewee offered, "There's different cultures between Latinos. There's Peruvians and Dominicans and there's Mexicans. I think a lot of people say okay the Spanish are here and call them all Mexicans." A Central American added, "We contribute by educating other people on issues, global awareness." An interviewee offered, "It's true we contribute by spicing things up culturally and financially we are hard working people." A woman from Peru added, "We don't eat what Mexicans eat."

Others offered examples of diversity like the new restaurants serving Mexican and El Salvadoran foods that were not available before in Des Moines. A Mexican exclaimed, "We provide good food." A Mexican included, "By putting up restaurants here and there the Hispanic add flavor." A Latina described the opportunity to hear Latin music and see dances, "At the Botanical Center they have food and dances with food. You see Anglos going and listening, watching." Availability of Spanish videos and films, a greater selection of different Hispanic foods in grocery stores and an ethnic shopping experience provided by Mexican stores were also byproducts of more Latinos in Des Moines.

More Spanish classes were offered and more people were interested in taking them due to a substantial increase in the Des Moines population of Spanish speaking peoples. A Spanish instructor added that you could provide cultural aspects to people in Des Moines when teaching Spanish. The Latina commented, "I think that teaching a second culture, a second language because the people love to learn about it. Every lesson has a little culture." Another Mexican conjectured that Latinos also added, "Smart intelligent people to Des Moines."

A young Latina from Mexico considered, "We bring a new way of looking at life and can teach as an outsider to Des Moines." A Latina brought out the idea of the Latino culture giving Des Moines new and colorful ethnic dimensions. And the Latinas added another way to look at what we have always taken for granted, a new way of looking at ourselves. The statement made by a new Latina from Mexico was, "Des Moines people have so many different looks, I see all the blue eyes. In my country they are all brown." A fact most individuals from Des Moines would never notice.

An interviewee expressed how good Latino workers were saying, "They will work anywhere. It's good for Iowa because they have people that are willing do jobs the Caucasian persons will not do. It is good for the economy for your Des Moines." Latinos were seen as one solution for needed workers. A Mexican stated, "Latinos are hard working and it's going to decrease the need for workers. Des Moines has a high rate of employment. They need people and I think Latinos are adding." One woman from El Salvador claimed, "The reason we have cheap meat is because of the Latino worker." A Latina believed "Latinos are seen as hard workers and model employees," which was also a contribution to Des Moines. Another positive impact of Hispanic immigration was the skills brought by Hispanics who were trained in their former countries. A woman declared, "Not all Mexicans are outside on the streets cooking tacos. We bring people who design computers. We're providing a lot of knowledge and technique for like construction."

A Central American established that, "The Hispanic community has also brought successful businesses to Des Moines. I think the impact of Latinos is becoming much stronger we are helping the local economy." A Latina from Mexico said, "Hispanics are a boon for the local economy." A woman who felt that Latinos added to the economy asserted,

> We buy things which strengthens the community. We are purchasing homes. When I bought my home I had to buy material to fix my house. I pay my taxes therefore I am contributing to the economy. Not only am I being careful of my property, I'm increasing the value of my property. The Hispanic has high purchasing power.

Another positive impact upon Des Moines was how Latino families viewed their families, that they have such strong family values. As one individual stated, "We are hard working and love our families." The respondents seemed to feel that the way Latinos related to their family members was a positive as well. A Latina who had raised children in Des Moines offered, "Latinos are strict with their children and taught how to behave." A Mexican said, "Women are raised to be respected." How Latinos behaved toward their families was also viewed by the Latinas as a positive impact. Another interviewee stated, "We are providing a new generation. I think we are more human more family oriented. We support our families we stay together. I think we are an example."

The Latino community set another example by not having debt and paying for items in cash. Hispanics claimed not to have credit cards. A Mexican offered, " Hispanics pay everything up front. They pay in cash. Because they want to or they don't understand the way checks work." Another Latina talked about herself and her lack of debt saying,

> I have a couple of jobs. So that I make more money so I can pay all the things in cash. I don't have a bad credit so that means I'm contributing to the economy because I am buying and not in debt. I'm paying my credit cards to zero balances which makes me an excellent customer.

A woman stated, "A contribution by Latinos is their deep rooted religious beliefs. I think if that if you believe in the Lord that much, it gives you different perspective on things.You are softer."

A Nicaraguan perceived there seemed to be an "indomitable spirit within the Latinas," that no matter what, they will succeed. Another Latina from Mexico added, "Hispanics who go to college and graduate have an impact because they communicate with other countries and business."

The sentiment that Latinos gave more than they took was an issue brought forward by several Latinas in differing ways. One woman related, "Latinos pay taxes, buy goods and services, and support schools. Just like everybody else." A Latina commented, "Latinos do not use services and are not a drain to those programs supported by taxes. And many undocumented workers pay taxes but never collect refunds because they are afraid." Another comment was, "Hispanics are proud and want to work for their support and generally dislike welfare." A Honduran added, "There's a myth we are on welfare and that we are lazy that was totally wrong."

There were also negative comments from the interviewees about the impact Latinos were making, such as increases in crime and drugs. A Latina offered, "I know people coming to do the hard work. But some people coming to do bad things too. And we are worried because it is true. People involved in drugs." Respondents noted when something bad was done by one Latino it reflected on all Hispanics. A woman explained,

> When I see someone who's a gang member who's Hispanic who robbed someone or killed somebody, that just devastates me. I wish they would not do that because you know that America has been so good to me and I want to show them we're good people. We are hard workers but it is hard work.

A Mexican woman, who had lived in California, had seen a change in the number of young men who had come, to the U.S. via gangs, in the last few years. She worried about how these Latino groups would affect the total Latino population. The Hispanic explained,

> Some people are not welcome and they are right; they want drugs, they cause problems and shoot. They are not welcome. I don't want them either. I don't agree with anyone that come to this country to break the law. Because two or three do it some people think that all Latinos do it. And that's not the truth. There are some bad seeds, no matter where you go, and they should be deported.

A Honduran gave her thoughts on Latinos whom she felt had come from California and were involved with drugs and offered,

> Latinos from California come here and with drugs. We know people who are coming and that is not good. I think more has changed since six years ago when we moved here. Is very sad. They involved in drugs and do bad things. Many people from California come with teenagers they move because of gangs but end up bringing them here.

Still, Latinas surmised that Hispanics contributed more to the community than they took away, but Latina's get labeled and stereotyped. The respondent added,

> Latinos are part of the bread line; they are part of the breadbasket. They're part of the feeding of America. They are contributors. That's the impact they have. I already

> know that people don't want to see them that there is a valuable impact by them. The impact I know perceived by a lot of people is negative that we are even here. Because we are drug dealers and they don't even know us.

A Mexican added that she believed Anglos only see the negative aspects of the Latina culture. The Mexican stated,

> Latinos are people who need more than they can give. Maybe we are an expense for Americans because we need welfare. We need help from the government we are not prepared. You have a lot of help with translations, medical resources again we have needs.

In contrast, another issue was that a few Latinas seemed to feel that there was an element of Hispanics, "who did not keep up their homes or yards and looked trashy." An interviewee said, "The negative side some Latinos are not neat and tidy some are clean and others are not. There seems to be a large number of Hispanics, most of them are Mexicans who come to Des Moines who do not have any resources. Des Moines has a large poor Hispanic community." Another Latina included, "I think most of the Latinos that live here are working class and that most of them are Mexicans."

Summary. Latinos pointed out to the rest of the community what is good in Des Moines by explaining why they were here. These positive points included good jobs and schools, and accepting people.

Learning about the Latinas' struggles and sacrifices in order to make a life in Des Moines impacts the larger community. Latinas recognized that living poorly in Des Moines was still better than living in their country of origin. Most of the Latinas were role models to the citizens who had taken for granted how easy it was to live in Des Moines. Latinos also offered the community the opportunity for non-Latinos to reach out, to change their comfort zone and engage in new cultures living among them.

Hispanics also impacted the Des Moines community with a strong spirit and work ethic. The Latinas had a creative will to make a better life for themselves and their families by working and playing hard. The Latino community came to Des Moines asking only for an opportunity, taking jobs no one else wanted and often working several. The Hispanics brought new music, dance and foods to Des Moines. The Latinas also made the Des Moines community take a closer look at itself as people from new cultures assimilated into the area.

Needs and Recommendations

The Latinas need to learn English, understand our laws, be able to get from one place to another, and have input into their children's education, and access to medical care. In fact, to insure a better life in the United States the Latinas felt they needed help in learning English. As one interviewee stated, "I think language is number one. I think they should learn English."

How to learn the laws of the United States, what they mean, and how the legal system worked was also a pressing need. A Mexican suggested, "Tell them how the system works. If you are arrested what will happen. Tell them what is going to happen." The other side of the legal issue was the need for Latinas to know how laws work so they are not taken advantage of. The Latino community needs to know what their rights are. One Mexican explained,

> There's too many people here that don't know the law, especially when you have an accident. When I had my first accident and a lady almost killed my son, I was asked to sign a document and I signed. My husband sign too. And I did not know if my son was going to be okay. And I realize that I sign the release of obligation if something would happen in the future. I want the law taught to the Latinos. We need perhaps a lawyer to teach the laws of buying a house or when you have an accident or an accident on the job. There are too many people who don't know the law.

Another Latina added, "There is a big need in this country to teach the Hispanic the regulations. What you can do and what you cannot do. Even driving, don't drive without a driver's license."

A Mexican, as well as several other Latinas, assumed that immigrants need assistance with getting their Visa applications and understanding the laws that affect them saying,

> We need to explain to them why it is so important to have a Visa. When they come for the Visa, why don't they write what the duties as an alien, a non-citizen. Explain to them how to become a citizen and what is the punishment of illegal re-entry because nobody knows. What is Social Security? What did Social Security do? What are the consequences of committing a misdemeanor?

A Honduran included, "The newcomers need to know what are your rights and what do you do with your papers. You have rights as a resident alien they need to know what to do if caught by police." An interviewee stated, "You are dealing with a lot of people who are ignorant about the rules and the regulations and the fees. But we are also dealing with a lack of resources to inform these people." A Hispanic added by saying,

> Try to help the people how to fix their papers. If they have been here for a certain time he was afraid to go. They are still illegal and they are afraid to get help. They should have the right to become legal but they afraid that they will be sent back home, when they already have a life here.

A Latina from South America exclaimed, "Just give the right directions. How to get a license, fill out the papers. I have already my notary. The people out there need help."

Transportation was seen as a dilemma. If an immigrant person was not able to drive, how do they get from one place to another. A Honduran said, "Transportation has to be better in Des Moines in general for the whole population. And if they do not speak English how do you ride the bus or take a cab when there is no assistance with the language?" A respondent added that transportation was access to programs or places of interest. The Latina stated,

> If Hispanics are getting to and using the YWCA, the Botanical Center, or Art Center, they would not be going to bars and getting themselves killed. But unless the Anglo community helps them to use these facilities it won't happen.

Another Latina thought there should be a place considered safe so that Latinas could go and listen to Latin music.

A Mexican made comments about how the Department of Transportation should provide support for Latinos who want to get a driver's license saying,

> There are a lot of people who could use volunteer bilingual person at the Department of Transportation. No matter how hard they resist things will have to change. Some of the books need to be in Spanish. You need a bilingual person on staff.

Day care was another request, "Child care for small children. My idea is to have child learn from a very young age. Not just be taken care of but work with the children." Several Latinas wished for affordable daycare for their small children. As one Latina requested, "Better access to better quality childcare."

Children in general was a theme that Latinas felt needed attention. One respondent was adamant stating, "The community needs to know what is happening to new immigrant children. Latinas need to get support for their children." One Latina wanted, "A club for her children. Children learn and interact with each other but also something where the mother learns and interacts." Another Latina expanded on the idea of children's programs including Anglos stating, "Both communities' children so they have an opportunity to learn about each other."

A Latina wanted information on Latino cultures to be made available to non-Latinos and stated, "We need to start earlier in teaching culture and include it in our schools. Language must begin in grade school." The Mexican also believed that religious leaders need to take part in teaching and learning each other's cultures. Another Mexican dreamt, "There should be more places for people to learn things like each other's arts and crafts." Another Latina added, "Have exchange students come to Des Moines and others would leave Des Moines and go to other countries." Another woman from Mexico deemed, "If adults had to live in another country from Des Moines for six months they would have a better outlook towards immigrants."

A woman from Mexico presented the idea of community center,

> I need a place like a community center for Latinos. Day care for women and place to learn English. Life when you come here like an immigrant was very hard. Because it so hard for woman to take care of kids go to work learn English. This is why teenagers leave school. The parents are not home. And the Spanish teenager easy to get into drugs.
> Because nobody is home. If you have a center that would have computers or dances would be fantastic.

A respondent supported a place for the young because she observed they get caught between Latino and Anglo worlds, "I would like better opportunities for younger Hispanics that are in school. I have seen problems with younger people who feel they don't fit in. They don't feel they fit here or they don't fit over there. They are in the middle."

One Latina wanted to find a way to help Latinas use welfare because welfare programs come with a stigma that made Latinos feel inadequate. The Central American offered,

> A Latino person will have the head down if they have to use the stamps because it is like a hand me down. There is a problem with that. I think Latinos should be treated like everyone else. I see the people from Bosnia with their head up because they feel good about themselves. Even if a Hispanic uses welfare for a short time, they will feel badly and that they have a hand out.

A young Latina commented, "Anglos should know that Hispanics work if they can. It is only if they don't have documents they don't."

The issue of domestic abuse was discussed by several interviewees but was a difficult issue to address due to cultural norms. Culturally, a Latina could not find help or support within the Latino community if her husband or boyfriend beat her. If a Latina turned her spouse in for abuse, the Hispanic community could shun her because she had gone against her family and it was not acceptable. This attitude was slowly changing but those Latinas who were subjected to abuse did not get help because of cultural bias. Another aspect of the issue of abuse was that there was very little help for the Spanish community respect to with Spanish speaking counselors who were also culturally sensitive. There wasn't the needed outreach by victim services to the Latino community. A Latina stated,

> I'm concerned about going into the Hispanic community and talking about it (abuse) because they say it is way too sensitive an issue. It is a very important issue. There are great women, Hispanic women waiting to happen but can't because they're trapped in a bad situation. We have great leaders waiting to happen who are being controlled and beaten by men. There are abused women who are not getting help because of the cultural issue. There are already existing entities that help abused women because of the cultural thing. We need an outsider there and to work harder on the issue.

A woman from Ecuador explained that spouse abuse was a larger issue and that frustration, racism, low pay, lack of training, and a combination of factors added to domestic abuse for Latinos. The Latina allegorized,

> I'm talking about one family. They pay $430 a month for rent and he makes $142 a week, $600 a month. How he gonna get the money, you know, for clothes, food? Four kids guess what? They get much better to have four drinks and forget about it and go home and 'pam pah pah.' And the police are called and they go to jail and guess what? It gets worse.

A Mexican suspected that Latinas need help with self-esteem saying "

> I would say a lot of Hispanic women are not secure; they not sure of being themselves. I think they need to be helped, to accept themselves for who they are. I would like to see self-esteem classes to help Latino woman.

Another Hispanic also considered self-esteem an issues that Latinas need support with and expounded,

> When they come to the United States first of all coming here was a big shock because they are different cultures. And they feel that they cannot fit because they feel they are not going to be able to do that. They afraid all the time. What about this and what about that? They do not try and will never know. That affects their self-esteem. That is one of the things we need to work on.

A Mexican adds to the topic of self-esteem by suggesting that Latinas become more assertive and clarified,

> I would educate myself to be assertive. I know it is hard. In order to survive and eventually succeed in what you want you need to move out of that place those boundaries that have been set by your own culture your own family and the outside world and ask what do you want?

A few of the interviewees spoke of a similar idea of having a centralized phone number or organization that would be a clearinghouse for support and help for Latinos. A respondent explained,

> Envision a centralized 800 number and a centralized office. A central location. But a place where there's proficient information. Not everyone will be an attorney but they will know how to contact one. They'll have access to Internet and email so they can be in touch with all kinds of other resources, even offering a place that would coordinate services already in place. Hispanics are not all about needs but new immigrants do need information on stores, schedules we don't have an ongoing calendar of events.

Several interviewees also expressed the need for a hot line staffed 24 hours a day. A woman explained, "Departments from various Social Services are often one person deep to help Latinos and, if they leave, there is no one." A Latina from Honduras believed, "There could be brochures, technology, and transportation with a centralized office dedicated to helping Latinos understand how to exist in their new country." An interviewee talked about her start in the U.S. saying,

> At the beginning it was like we did not have an orientation so you were an observer, a spectator, to what these people were really like. What do these people really want? And I wanted to use my skills. And now I've been there so somebody comes as a visitor and does not know English, I can help and I want to make a difference. I would like to help and say this is what you are supposed to do. Unless you know what the rules are you could hurt people's feelings because you don't know the culture.

A South American talked about the International Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, that helped new immigrants become productive citizens through various support mechanisms and classes. The woman illustrated, "The International Institute where people could go and learn all the things basic things including language. It helped me so much." Other Latinas discussed how Canada and Australia offer classes to new immigrants to educate them on how to become a citizen and learn the customs of the country. An El Salvadoran offered,

> One of the things Australia does for immigrants is send them to school, and they tell them these are our customs. We don't want you to lose your customs but we would like you to learn what we do why we do it so we can get along better.

A respondent used Canada as a model that is supportive of its immigrants. She described the Canadian immigration support program in the following terms,

> Help take care of the language. I think there is a basic need to help people learn how to live here and people learn trial by fire. But we could make better grounds, I think Canada does it better they offer to help people figure out how to live in culture and we just let people out their on their own.

A Latina from Cuba explained that a program called Proteus is available which addressed the needs of migrants but that Des Moines had so few migrants the money should be used for all Latinos. The Latina clarified,

> We have a program here that helps migrants with 50% of their income. But the program does not do anything; it just helps to find jobs or go to school. The program should be for everybody. Anybody that comes here and works in a meatpacking plant, any immigrant. Give them training. Combine this money and help everyone who needs it. I don't say put someone in with six years of college but give them training to be a carpenter.

Many Hispanics found out about services for immigrants by word of mouth, or informal networking. By word of mouth two Latinas from El Salvador and Mexico found out about a clinic to help with their pregnancies. Therefore, the informal networking of the Latino community was a means to getting needed information to Hispanics. A Latina stated, "I just see people in the street. And they talk because Hispanic people are nice. You ask them something and they give you information."

Respondents surmised there needed to be leadership developed within the Latina community. A Honduran said that there were some self-appointed leaders who received a lot of press but did not speak or represent the community. The Latina explicated,

> We need to find the true leader in the community. The people who people trust and feel comfortable with. Which is not the case among Hispanics. I mean Hispanics have the little egos thing going you know me me me. But we need to unify other people who have common interests. But Hispanics do need to sit down as a team and go to the meeting that I go to there's interest of planning a professional I mean total inclusive organization of Hispanics where no one is going to say oh no because you only speak English. No you can't because you only speak Spanish. Or you cannot because you work at a meat packing company or you can't because you're vice president of a company.

A Latina from Central America added, "We need more specific investment and empowerment of Hispanics. Set up something where Hispanics can develop their skills. Make an investment because it will pay off in long run for the entire community. However it has to include individuals who are culturally sensitive to differences."

A Mexican saw the need to teach Latinos how to volunteer saying,

> I need to teach my people how to volunteer. This is what I like about here people help but never in my country did we volunteer. Never taught that when you have free time to help anybody. I would like to see the Latino here now learn to volunteer. When you have free time help the other ones.

Several Latinas talked about the need for an emergency shelter for Spanish speaking individuals. A woman requested, "They are so poor a place that would have food, clothing. I can bring you a place where the people don't eat, because they don't have papers." And the need of a clothes bank would be helpful for winter, not only for children but also for those who need clothes to go to work. A woman from Ecuador rendered, "We don't know if 7 or 10 people come in a van no food, no clothes." The Ecuadorian also discussed the need for emergency assistance funds to help people who do not have money for rent or heat.

The Latina from Nicaragua depicted,

> They get off the bus and they start going. They go to any street that they see is a main street. And they start walking. To see if they see a sign in Spanish. If they walk the wrong direction they will never get there. There should be signage at the bus station that offered directions and assistance to those who arrive and have no place and no one to go to. We need to get a hold of the pastors because they draw the Latino people and they need to put the sign there. And then some kind of networking for the people that just came a way to get information to those who come with out papers.

A Honduran saw the need to monitor Police and their attitudes towards Latinos, especially police officers who were Hispanic. The interviewee offered,

> Teach police they need to treat everybody, that they don't have to beat us more just because they want to show their Anglo partners that they are, you know, not Hispanic anymore that they're Anglo now and beat us harder. But Africans and Hispanics and Asians and Bosnia's and Sudanese be a part of the council that can speak up for the community against abuses from law enforcement, which law enforce has I think has a license to kill in Iowa. I would also do more investment in and empowering Hispanics.

Interviewees suggested helping Latinos to get credit, or to open a checking account.

They also talked about how the Latino community pays cash for everything and do not like debt. Yet one respondent said, "Latinos do not know how to open a checking account and if they are undocumented, cannot." Another Latina from Mexico expressed frustration that even if you did have good credit and had a checking account, if you wanted a loan as a non-citizen you had to have a co-signer for the loan. The Mexican questioned,

> Why should you be asking other people to sign for you when you have good credit. So how do you answer the questions of how to buy a car, get a loan, or get money for

> college? I really want to start a fund for students like me that want to go to school and cannot get a loan.

A second Latina talked about having to go to family and friends to be able to get money to open a business.

A Latina from Central America believed that Anglos needed to learn to relax when talking to a Hispanic who had an accent. When Anglos listen to someone with an accent, they get nervous and make the communication that much harder. The woman said,

> I'm going to talk about if you're nervous because you don't understand. And you feel bad because you have to ask them. The reason is you don't understand because if the situation makes you a little nervous a little confused it was harder to understand. I don't want to offend but that is true. It makes the listener feel inadequate uncomfortable because they don't understand. It was nothing to do with, it was not I don't like you. It makes you feel uncomfortable. Your accent makes them feel bad they don't understand you. Maybe if Anglos were more exposed to the language they would feel they it understand better. The more exposure the more relaxed.

One respondent stated that the Des Moines community needs to recognize that Latinos are all different and cannot be lumped in one group saying,

> Des Moines has a working class of Latinos from Mexico for the most part. But even still their needs to be a way to educate Des Moines that not all Latinos are the same or have the same experiences. They do not know anything about any of the Latinos or their cultures. For example eating and doing business is so different. And people in Des Moines need more exposure.

A Hispanic stated, "I think that Anglos would be interested in taking classes. They are doing business in Latin America." A woman from Central America explained "A campaign to inform the Des Moines community about why so many Hispanics have moved to the states. That Latinos are here to be able to find work and are doing the work that no one else wants to do." One interviewee perceived, "The media could help by doing stories on different cultures in the Des Moines community by offering programs to educate others about the cultural differences." A series of articles on the Latina culture was seen as a way to get education to a vast array of people. Another suggestion was to use the weekend event section of the paper to list any Hispanic functions and inviting the public to these. A respondent offered another direction, "The Latinas don't know about the Midwest or the U.S. culture. I have helped teach about that. I think it helps."

Another issue was cultural sensitivities and the manner in which Latinas addressed others compared to Anglos who went to the informal too quickly. One Latina complained that she was called by her first name by a stranger and was offended because calling someone by his or her first name is considered too familiar in Latino culture. The woman believed it was necessary to let Anglos know the difference, not to make them change, but for them to understand why a Latina may react negatively to being called by first names.

A Latina deemed that wealthy Latino immigrant families should learn to do some charity work for the new Latino. The woman believed that the Latinos who had become successful could make a difference to those who were new and struggling.

> A big, important thing here is the Latinas that are wealthy might do a little charity with the Latinas who are not. But they won't get down to their level. People need to understand that if we help the other Latino people we can get a lot of satisfaction out of it. And we can bring up the standard of living if people learn English and other basic stuff. Help them fill out their papers. Help these people find their place.

A Latina made the plea that everyone in the community was affected by the Latino community saying,

> The legislators need to understand the need of the culture because let me tell you too many people think that because they are not affected by Latinos that's their problem. How can anyone think that it was not gonna affect our society if we don't get Hispanic educated too or if they don't get services? Because what happens when people live on the margins of society is that is what breeds gangs, that breeds discontent, that's breeds people not caring. And someone steals from someone else or sells drugs to somebody else. Those are things that are negative to the whole community. But if they are not made to be a part of the community, why bother who cares. There will continue to be problems. The entire community has got to care about the Latino community.

Another Latina added, "If you are treated badly and have no place to get help you will act badly."

A Latina made the suggestion that businesses and media learn how to market to Hispanics. "We would develop exclusively marketed materials for Hispanic for certain stores." The same Latina observed there could also be job training and placement service for Hispanics.

Another idea was to "Train individuals who provide service to the general public, such as cashiers, cultural sensitivity." The Latino community buys goods and services but several incidents of discrimination were cited at the cash register.

Another issue was how blacks viewed Latinos. One Latina expressed concern, "The Black community was or will be at odds with the Latino population because of new programs geared toward Hispanics. There needs to be more dialogue between the two minorities."

A Mexican also sensed that there needed to be more opportunities to bring Latinos and non-Latinos together saying, "Anglos and Spanish try to get together like at church services. Get people together and find more things to do." One example was to bring more Anglos to church services that celebrate a typical Hispanic holiday. For example the *Virgen de Guadalupe* feast occurs on December 12th. Bring Anglos and Latinos together to share and to get to know one another on a holiday such as this.

A respondent believed, "Latinos need to cooperate and participate with the system. Having Hispanic individuals run for public office was one way to do this. Latinos need to show a voice and lobby for the laws that affect Hispanics. Hispanics should be participating with lawmakers."

One Latina summed up the needs of the Latino community by saying, "You just give me the tools to be a person and I can be like everyone else. I need to learn the language, have a drivers license, be able to find a job."

Another Latina sensed that a cultural sensitivity program would also be helpful. A woman from Honduras was made to feel uncomfortable about breast feeding her child. She explained,

> I've breast feed my child because I am Hispanic. That was how I feed my child. But culturally that's not true here. Even though the nurses don't care and they're open, but they look at you funny. So that's not culturally sensitive to my needs of feeding my child.

The fact that the woman was with nurses at the time of the incident seemed to make it worse.

A Latina from El Salvador explained,

> Latinos needed help in understanding the culture they were now living in and what it all means. What were the customs, what were the cultural norms, how were celebrations done, and what foods were eaten was just the beginning.

A Hispanic respondent considered the Iowa State Fair an opportune time to expose the public at large about the Hispanic culture. By showing dances, offering foods, and having traditional music played. (The exchange of food, art, and music were seen as ways to bridge people.)

A woman from Mexico talked about cultural training and learning how to live in the United States with so many decisions to make for Hispanics. The interviewee talked about how difficult it was for Latinas to make choices and the need to help Latinas with self-esteem and assertiveness training in order to cope with living in the Untied States. The Latina stated,

> Because something that I didn't know about this country was that you have plenty of choices here. And we to have a place we are within this space and you're not supposed to move outside of that little place. And here in order to survive and eventually succeed in what you want to do you need to move out of that place, out of

> those boundaries that have been set by your won culture, your own family, and by the outside world and ask yourself what do I want?

A Latina asked for tolerance for Latinos so that they would be able to learn and grow into the community. The Ecuadorian asked, "Patience, the Spanish people don't wanna be bad. Some people bad because they don't find good people."

A Mexican wanted an opportunity to be able to make Des Moines her home. She did not want a hand out but a chance to do it on her own without roadblocks. The woman said,

> I say, "don't give me anything; just don't stop me. Don't put up barriers to me don't give me anything. I will do it myself but don't stop me." We need to demand the integrity of our dignity because we are human beings that have abilities. We are looked at as just as problem. We are perceived as a problem. Our talents, our gifts, our skills the ones we bring with us here are not recognized, not valued and are not used. I want to be educated about the rest of the community experience. What it means for you to have Latino neighbors or immigrant neighbors. What it means to have this wave of foreign-born people coming to your town? How did you feel about it? But straight from your heart, not from your pockets or your politics, straight from your heart. I want to know that. I want to understand you. I want to know you. I want to become friends, but we are not given that opportunity. There are plenty of multicultural university classes for Anglos to learn about Bosnians, to learn about Laotians, to learn about Vietnamese, to learn about the rest of the world, but there are no classes for us to learn about this society. How can we know? We need that as much as you need to learn about us. We need to learn about you.

Another respondent sensed that Hispanics were invisible in Des Moines explaining,

> "Anglos need to look differently at Hispanics, not as problems but as assets."

Summary. Hispanics had much to offer the Des Moines community. Hispanics were willing to work hard at making an effort for a better life and asked only to be given the opportunity. Much of the needs of the Latino community were simple basic tools in order to get a better foothold in the new country they are in. No one interviewed wanted anything for free; no hand out, just an opportunity. The Latinas wanted to be able to speak English, find a job, perhaps buy a home with a loan, become a citizen, help their children gain an education, and be with their family. The Latinas asked to be recognized as those who contributed and not as a burden on the community. Latinas wanted above all else to be respected as human beings.

Chapter 12

DISCUSSION

The extant literature largely focused on the immigration of poor Mexican males coming to the United States. To be sure, there were writings on Latino women, but a large portion of the literature was on men. In contrast, this study concentrated entirely on Latinas from 10 different countries, all of whom came from a wide range of economic backgrounds. Similarly in contrast, the literature focused on Latinos in poverty and only occasionally offered insight into Hispanics from middle to upper class. The findings of this study found immigration by various income groups into the U.S. and Des Moines including Latinos living in poverty.

What to be called?

There was much written in the literature about what to call persons who have immigrated to the United States from south of the border such as the following: Latinos, Hispanics, Chicanos, or by country of origin as Mexicans or Peruvians (Garza, 1994). The agreement was that there was no agreement other than names appear to be interchangeable (Stavans, 1995). How a Latino would like to be referred to was very much an individual decision. There were arguments for each title, with no answer acceptable to everyone. In fact, almost every interviewee in the findings had her own opinion of what she wanted to be called. Latino was the favored choice for the persons in the research, though many women preferred to be called by their former country identify such as Nicaraguan or Peruvian. None of the interviewees believed any title was in bad taste, they simply had a preference of how the wished to be called.

Language

Speaking Spanish was found to be important to Latinas not only in the findings of this study but in the literature as well (Acuna, 1988). But speaking Spanish was also a source of conflict. The findings and research both found that a few non-Spanish speakers were offended at hearing Spanish (Gonzalez, 2001). The research also agreed with the literature that moving back and forth between the languages is stressful (Rodriguez, 1994). For Latinas the ability to maintain the Spanish language was a cultural issue and at the core of being Hispanic. Yet learning English was seen as imperative for success in the U.S., which proved true in both the findings and the literature (Melendez, 1998). The ability to speak English was seen as an important tool for educational and workplace advancement in current U.S. society for Hispanics.

Language was a complicated issue, however. For example, it was important to Latinas, especially as mothers, that their children not only speak English but also Spanish. In fact, in the findings there were mothers who moved to Mexico to expose their children to Spanish and Latino culture so that her children would become immersed. Also found both in the data and literature were children who would not speak Spanish while living in the U.S. (Heyck, 1994). The children refused to speak Spanish even if their parents were non-English speakers. Then again there were children who were angry with their parents for not teaching them to speak Spanish as children.

Marriage and Cultural Issues

The writings strongly suggested that in Hispanic marriages, males were the head of the house and females were subservient to men. While the literature indicated that Latino culture expected women to be second to their husbands (Anzaldua, 1999) this study does not completely follow the literature. The research found that although respondents were on more equal ground with their spouses, though the husband was deemed to be the head of the house, the Latinas were not subservient to them. The literature also stated that there were new trends occurring in more modern cities of Latin America and that relationships were equalizing somewhat between men and women (Rodriguez, 1994). While the findings concluded that Latinas saw their husband as head of the house, they also saw the trend in the Latino culture of Latino couples acting as more equals. The findings and literature both suggested that the longer Latinos couples lived in the U.S., the more equal the marriage relationships became.

An issue not found in the literature but in the findings was Latinas who married Anglo-Americans. These unions were found to be difficult, given how Latinas have been typically raised. The Latina found the reaction to Anglo spouses confusing because the Anglo had approached the marriage on more equal terms and the Latina did not know how to respond. The fact that Latinas were more subservient towards their partners and did not assert their desires was confusing to Anglo men who expected a more direct spouse.

Divorce

Divorce was another topic not addressed in the literature, but found in the findings. Many of the interviewees had been divorced or were from divorced families. The Latinas who dealt with divorce addressed themselves as unique and thought they were a rare example in Latino culture.

Work

The findings found more white-collar Latinas working outside the home, after having acquired secondary schooling, and in professional careers than the literature alluded to. The literature focused more on Hispanic women who were working outside of the home for basic economic needs (Repack, 1997). The findings agreed that many Latinas go to work to supplement a husband's income because the couple cannot make ends meet. These Latinas typically work in poor paying jobs. However, these are not the only Latinas in employment in the United States. There are college educated Latinas working in professional careers but the literature gives little information about these Latinas. The research does agree, however, with the literature that the higher the education and job status the more likely it would be that Latinas spoke English (Rodriguez, 1994). Unfortunately, the findings concurred with the literature that Latinas had been taken advantage of and sometimes abused by employers.

Segregation

The fact that Latinos tend to live in homogenous neighborhoods where their neighbors speak primarily Spanish was stressed in the literature. This study did not agree and found that the Latinas lived in neighborhoods throughout parts of the community and were not segregated into one particular neighborhood. This difference may be indicative of the population of the city and the number of Latinos who have moved to Des Moines. Perhaps with more Latinos a critical mass would create more "Latino neighborhoods."

Shopping

Shopping trends or needs were not addressed in the literature except to mention that neighborhoods with concentrated population of Latinos had little Hispanic stores which were typically called *La Tiende*. Therefore the issue of being able to buy things from one's native country to help celebrate former holidays or the ability to buy foods to make traditional foods was not a topic of discussion in the literature. However, in the study, shopping for traditional items had been frustrating to Latinas, but there were several Latino stores available in Des Moines. For some of the respondents who did not speak English there was also an issue of language when shopping. These Latinas had difficulty trying to buy items they did not understand or know how to cook.

Holidays and Celebrations

Discussions about holidays were found in both the literature and in the findings. Latinas from the study found this issue hard to address. Both the literature and study agreed that Latinas were seen as the family member who adhered to and passed on traditions of holidays and celebrations. It was also Latinas who had to choose how to celebrate holidays once the family immigrated to the U.S., and it was a difficult and often painful process for them (Menard, 2000; Rodriguez, 1994).

Driving

The ability to drive a car was not a topic in the literature but it was prevalent in the study. The ability to drive a çar denoted freedom and advancement in the United States. It also alluded to the man's control of the house, whether he would let his wife drive. While most of the Latinas in the study drove, some did not until they arrived in the U.S. and circumstances forced them to do so, a few still do not drive. Other interviewees had been taught by their mothers in their former countries to drive; the mothers had insisted that their daughters learn to drive. The ability to drive was a very important issue for Latinas in the research.

Assimilation and Acculturation

Assimilation and acculturation were often viewed as the same issues in the literature while the findings saw them as comparatives. The findings defined assimilation as the subjugation of the immigrant to the new host society, and acculturation as the adaptation of the individual to the new host society while maintaining part of their original culture.

The literature suggested that intermarriages, speaking English, and attitude were large indicators of assimilation (Pastor & Castaneda, 1989). The literature also added that several Latin American countries offer dual citizenship to former citizens, which creates more confusion for Latinas assimilating (Gonzalez, 2001). While the findings of this study did not disagree, it should be added that the acculturation process would allow Latinas to make their homes in Des Moines and continue holding on to native traditions.

The findings do concur with the literature that Latinas would like multiple paths and be able to be both American and Latino (Heyck, 1994). Assimilation is a process that takes time, and is a stressful process.

Isolation

The topic of isolation did not appear in the literature but it was a topic of concern for Latinos. The problem of isolation compounded itself when the Latinas did not speak English, were not connected to anyone, did not know the area, could not drive, and were at home raising small children alone. Currently there were few programs that helped and supported Latinas who felt isolated. The problem of loneliness was a large issue for Latinas who felt isolated, even from those who spoke Spanish.

Family

The Latino family was a theme that occurred in both literature and the findings. Mothers were found to be a very important influence on their children (Rodriguez, 1994) and were actually the center of the family. A mother was the protector and provider of language and culture within the family, and the family was a primary focus for the Latinas. For them family came first and foremost. Even religious celebrations and social events were most often centered on the family with the mother in charge.

Children and Elderly

The needs of children were addressed in both the writings and the findings. The argument that Hispanic children were dropping out of school at a higher rate than other minorities, and were targeted and recruited by drug dealers and gangs, was an ubiquitous concern (Trueba, 1998). The literature stated that Latino children were caught between two worlds, seeing the possibilities of the U.S. but living in poverty. Both the data and literature agreed that Latino children had been subjected to discrimination and abuse, which in turn created attitudes that ended in behaviors of juvenile delinquency (Trueba 1998). Children, the literature cited often, become Americanized much faster then their parents and this created conflicts within the home. The literature felt that the longer a child stayed with the traditional teaching of the family the better the acculturation would be in U.S. (Trueba, 1998). Findings concluded that many Hispanic children were left alone by working parents who did not value a high school education in the U.S. The literature and findings reviewed young Hispanic males who had come to the U.S. looking to make fast money and found they could not get a decent job, faced discrimination and abuse, and ended up selling drugs and joining gangs. The literature cited families who would moved back to the former country to salvage a child who was getting into problems in the U.S.

The elderly were discussed in both the findings and literature but the research results were in disagreement. The literature felt that it was a myth that the Latino elderly were part of extended families (Torrez, 1996). However, the interviewees stated that their countries did not have nursing homes and that the elderly were always cared for by the family.

Education

Education was found in both the findings and literature with regard to Latinas. For some of the interviewees their parents, particularly their fathers or grandfathers, had not seen the merit in educating a daughter whom they felt would get married and be supported by a husband. But the literature found those Latinas, supported emotionally by their families, particularly by their mothers, could be very successful in higher education (Segura, 1999). Family support for Latinas was critical as they were going against traditional views for Latinas. The literature also states that the Latino community, family needs and peer pressure often clash with school expectations for Latinas (Ginorio & Huston, 2000). Another issue was Latinos who didn't feel that education was significant and who saw work as more valued had children who were at a higher risk for drug use (Suro, 1999). In the literature the ability to speak English was also seen as a factor for success in school (Castenda, 1989). The findings found that speaking English was essential for a Latina's success in school. The findings and literature concur that there were a high number of Latinas dropping out of school (Heyck, 1994).

Age

The ages of the Latinas were notable in that they were fairly young when they made the decision to move to the U.S. All but two of the interviewees were under 30. By the time the Latinas had moved to Des Moines and were interviewed, they were considerably older. Ages were not discussed in the literature with regard to immigration.

Back and Forth

The phenomenon of Latinos moving back and forth between the U.S. and their former country was in both the data and literature. Some immigrants did not plan to stay in the U.S., and were here only to make a certain amount of money that would afford them a more comfortable lifestyle in their native country. The literature actually categorized three different kinds of Latinas who moved back and forth (Pastor & Casteneda, 1989). The findings also found interviewees who fit into these categories.

Crossing the Border

How illegal immigrants arrived in the U.S. was addressed in both the literature and findings. The discussions reviewed both the immigrants crossing the U.S. Mexican border and those who were coming into the U.S. legally and overstaying their visas. For example, Latinas would come on a tourist visa and overstay the length of time they were allowed (Suro, 1998). Crossing the border was addressed in both writings and findings as very difficult and dangerous. The abuses women suffered and were subjected to, the hiring of a coyote who would take advantage of new immigrants, the border patrol, and the cost were documented in both the readings and research (Fuentes 1997).

Discrimination

Discrimination was found as a problem for Hispanics in both the literature and data. The issue of color was a primary concern for the Latinas. The darker the skin tone the more likely a Latina would be subjected to discrimination (Martinez, 1998; Zavella, 1997). The Latinas discussed physical attributes of themselves and other Latinas noting skin and hair color.

The literature and findings both noted incidents when Hispanics had been told to go back home, or told that if "you live in this country, speak English!"

Some Anglos cannot see the cultural differences between Hispanics and refer to them all as Mexicans. Anglos see all Hispanics as foreigner even if the person had been born in the U.S. (Garcica, 2000). Both the findings and study noted that some Anglos see all Latinos as the same (Garcia, 2000).

The literature disagreed with the findings that Latinas had only found discrimination in the U.S. The literature documented discrimination against people of color in the immigrant's former countries (Oboler, 1997). The findings found the Latinas felt that discrimination was not apart of their culture. But the literature related that prejudices were associated with a class and culture stemming from colonial days in Latin American countries (Oboler, 1997).

Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of Latinos were discussed in both the literature and findings. The literature stated that Latinas felt blue-eyed blondes were considered attractive (Blea, 1997) and that dark hair and skin were not. The findings agreed that Latinas saw blonde hair and blue eyes as notable but the findings found that the Latinas saw themselves as attractive. Both the findings and literature agreed that darker skinned Latinos have experienced discrimination.

INS

Working with the INS and the process of citizenship was not found in the literature; however, it was a large concern for the interviewees in the findings. Working with the INS was seen as a negative experience by the interviewees while the literature did not address this issue.

Immigration

The findings and literature agreed that as immigration mandates and laws changed, so did the political climate towards immigrants. The literature found reforms intended to keep immigrants out actually increased their numbers (Suro, 1999). The findings reported that it was difficult for Latinas to know what the current laws were.

Friends

The theme of friendship was discussed in the findings as something Latinas highly value. Getting together with friends was a large part of the social lives of Latinas and one that did not take planning: you could simply stop over. The literature offered the explanation of Latina interdependence: the idea that they valued themselves by the associations they kept. A Latina defined her self worth, in part, by whom she associated with (Rodriguez, 1994).

Social Activities

The social activities of Latinas, i.e., getting together with friends, listening to music and dancing, were a part of the findings and literature. Both music and dance were considered very important pastimes for Latinos. The literature and findings alluded to the fact that Latinas saw church as a social outlet (Heyck, 1994). Church was an opportunity to get together with family and friends.

Single Latinas

The literature did not discuss single Latinas coming into the U.S. Most times it emphasized that women came to the United States because they were married and their partners had already moved to the U.S. However, the findings cited several single Hispanic women who had come on their own to either study or find a job in the U.S.

Impact

The impact that Latinos had on the U.S. was similar in both the findings and writings. Hispanics were viewed as a valuable labor supply for lower paying jobs that Anglos would not fill. Hispanics paid taxes but most often did not use government services (Fuentes, 1997). There were also a large number of Latinos who did not collect income tax refunds they were due because they lacked documents. Findings also offered that Latinos contributed to diversity in the community and added flavor with new cultural restaurants, businesses, and music. The literature stated that Latinos moving into a new city created new jobs (Martinez, 1998) to meet the needs of Latinos.

Religion

Both the literature and findings confirmed that Latinas had a strong personal faith in God. The literature found that Latinas were the family's source of religious guidance (Riddle, 1993). Most Latinas were Catholic, but not all. The conclusions and literature agreed that many Latinas were not Catholic due to the fact that the Church had not wanted them and subjected them to discrimination (Sandoval , 1994) . The research also concurred that some Latinas felt abandoned by the church at those times when they felt they needed the church the most.

Celebrations

Celebrations were reviewed in both the literature and in the findings. The issue of what and when to celebrate was discussed (Menard, 2000). The Latinas celebrated many holidays that were based on their religion (Noble & Lacasa, 1991). After moving to the U.S.

many Latinas often decided to either let the celebration of those holiday lapse or try and maintain them; which most found hard to do.

Health Care

Health care was a subject of discussion in both the study and literature. The literature focused on poor Latinas and their lack of health insurance coverage (Torre, 1993; Basu, 2000). The findings agreed that this was an issue but also found that the lack of language skills by both the Latinas and health care professionals hampered adequate medical care for Hispanics.

Birth control was also a theme that appeared in the findings and writings with both agreeing that cultural attitudes and lack of resources made birth control difficult (Riddell, 1993) for Latinas to access.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence was a problem that appeared in the literature and research and both were in agreement on this issue. The issue with domestic violence was that Latinas were raised to put themselves last and the needs of their family and spouses first respectively (Flores-Ortiz, 1993). A Latina will not go against a family member for her own needs, even if that person is causing her harm. Battered Latinas, the literature stated, will not leave their husbands for a long period of time (Flores-Ortiz, 1993). The findings suggested that there was not enough being done with the problem of domestic abuse towards Latinas.

Politics

Finally, politics was a theme that emerged several different ways in both the data and literature. The literature saw the potential power that Latinos will have as a voting block, and as the number of Latinos grows into second and third generation, the more power they will have (Janofsky, 2000). Currently, Hispanics do not mirror their strength in numbers politically because of ages and the number of non-citizen Latinos (Castaneda, 1995). The ability to be able to be in a Democratic Society and to vote was considered important to the Latinas.

Media

In both the findings and literature, the media was found to poorly represent Latinos or not to represent them at all (Gonzalez, 2001).

Police

How police worked with Latinos was noted in the research and it was indicated that police needed additional diversity training and that Latinos seemed to be singled out. The literature concurs and noted racial profiling by police towards Latinos.

Summary

Agreement

In summary, the findings and literature agreed on several issues. One of them was what Latinas wanted to be called and concluded that there was no consensus. There was not a correct word to use for all Latinas. Hispanics and Latinos were often used interchangeably.

Both the literature and study agreed that while Latinas need to have a command of English, they also want to maintain their native language. Holidays were also difficult to address for Latinas living in the U.S. was found in both literature and research. For many reasons some holidays were no longer celebrated and new American ones were added to holiday traditions of Latino families living in Des Moines.

The literature and findings strongly agreed that Latino culture placed the mother as a strong influence in Hispanic families. The mother was the protector and provider for culture, language, celebrations, and the family's focus on religion. The worrisome issue of Latino children subjected to drugs and gangs was found in both the literature and findings. Children were caught between two worlds.

Education was a topic discussed at length in both research and literature that culturally Latinas were held back because education was not seen as important for them. However, if a mother supported a Latina in education, particularly in higher education, she had a better likelihood of doing better.

Many Latinas went back and forth between the U.S. and their country of origin, often staying for years at a time in either direction. Latinas would come to the U.S., stay for several years, return to Mexico for several more years and then again move back to the U.S.

The risk of crossing the border from Mexico into the U.S. was documented in agreement in both the research and literature. Latinas were at a high risk for death, rape, and other abuses crossing the border into the U.S.

Discrimination issues were found in both studies with regard to color of skin for Latinas. Both also emphasized that Anglos tend to lump all Latinos into one category and look upon them as foreigners.

The fact that Latinos performed jobs others would not, provided necessary labor, and paid into tax pools with no prospect of getting refunds was found in literature and findings. Also, in agreement was the fact Latinos did not access services as widely as they could.

Religion and the Catholic Church were topics in agreement, finding many but not all Latinas were Catholic. That the Catholic Church had a history of discrimination towards Latinos was also seen in agreement.

Birth control was found as a need in both the literature and findings but cultural mores made it difficult for Latinas to access. Health care issues were also addressed but more emphasis on insurance was found in the literature while language barriers were found in the research.

Domestic violence was also in agreement with the literature and research with culture mores again making the topic even more difficult. Latinas would not turn an abuser in because of cultural issues.

The interdependence of Latinas and friends was addressed in the findings and literature. Latinas needed to have friends and a sense of belonging in order to feel complete. Getting together with friends was seen as a large part of the social activity of Latinas. Latinas also found Latin music and dance as a part of their social components.

Politics and the right to vote were found in both the findings and literature. In fact, Latinos were seen as a voting block that could have impact for future elections.

Disagreement

The literature did not cite many other country examples but seemed to focus on poor Mexicans while the findings focused on Latinas from 10 countries and a variety of economic backgrounds.

While the literature agreed with the research that Latinos were the head of the house. the findings saw a stronger trend of Latinas having a more equal say and more equal status than alluded to in the literature.

A topic not found in the literature was Latinas who married Anglos and the difficulties these unions created because of cultural differences. The literature also focused on Latinas who work outside the home to supplement their husbands' salary. Several Latinas in the study worked in careers as professionals, having gone on to school. The literature said very little about Latinas in careers.

Where and why Latinas shopped was omitted in the literature, the topic was revealed in the findings. Shopping brought to light such issues as language, transportation, and discrimination that new Latinas had to face in a different culture.

The literature alluded to the fact that Hispanics tended to be segregated into specific neighborhoods, or *barrios,* but this observation was not found as true in the research. In the study Latinas lived in scattered areas throughout the city of Des Moines.

Divorce was not a topic of discussion found in the literature but it was most definitely found in the findings. Many of the interviewees were either divorced or from divorced families and most thought they were unusual because of this. The Latinas had the misperception that Latinos took their marriage vows much more intensely than Anglos.

The issue of driving a car was not a topic found in the literature either. However, driving a car was seen as a truly big issue in the findings. For the Latina to be able to drive a car was a very significant achievement or lack thereof.

Acculturation and assimilation were approached quite differently for the most part in the literature. The two were seen as nearly synonymous in the literature while the findings separated out the two definitions. Acculturation was viewed as a way Latinas could incorporate American ways while maintaining Latino culture. Assimilation was defined and viewed as a comprehensive adaptation to a new society.

Isolation was a discussion point for almost every Latina and was viewed as a serious issue and a need for Latinas to address. Isolation was not discussed in the literature.

The findings did not address discrimination in the Latin American countries. In fact, only one respondent felt that discrimination did not exist in her country.

The literature did not address the process of getting U.S. citizenship, whereas the research found it to be a significant and powerful topic for the respondents in the findings.

The issues single Latino women face, while some were concluded in the research findings, were not found in the literature.

Chapter 13

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to give Latina immigrants living in Des Moines, Iowa a voice. The intent was to help Latinas understand that the concerns and issues they had were not in isolation but shared by others. In this way the respondents served as a resource for helping future immigrant Latino women. The information collected was also intended for policy makers in the community who lacked current information on the needs and issues of Latinas living in the area. In addition, the study offered insights for individuals working to address the needs of Latinas in the community. The research supported other investigations done on Latinos in Des Moines and added to this body of information because it focused only on Latinas and their specific issues while also preserving their life histories and documenting their lives so that, future generations would know what life was like for these immigrants to the Midwest.

The research questions sought to understand when, how, and why a Hispanic woman chose to leave her country and move to Des Moines. The questions explored what life was like for Latinas, what they needed to survive daily life, and the problems they faced living in Des Moines. The study reviewed whether the women would remain in the area, and if not, why not? The research asked the Latinas what they did and did not like, what was good and bad, and what they considered as their successes and failures living in the U.S. The study analyzed how the Hispanic culture interacted within the greater Des Moines community and what policies, programs or suggestions Latinas had for themselves and for future immigrants.

The study was conducted by in-depth interviews with twenty-four immigrant Latinas who lived in Des Moines for at least two years. Opened-ended questions were asked of each interviewee. The interviews were held at the discretion of the respondents; sometimes in their homes, office's or the subjects' workplace. Notes were taken and audio tapes made at the time of the interviews and the same five questions were asked. The interviews lasted from one to three hours. Transcriptions of interviews were made from the audio tapes and then coded. Findings were studied and written from the codes using direct quotes of the Latinas to state the results. The results were reviewed for relevancy and accuracy by presenting the findings to respondents and an outside Hispanic group.

This study was a collection of personal thoughts, feelings and individual stories of how and why 24 Latino women decided to move from their respective places of birth to the United States and then to the unknown area of Des Moines. The decision to immigrate was not an easy one to make for most of the respondents and their individual reasons for immigrating to the United States were due to a variety of hardships and opportunities. The immigrant women in this study arrived in Des Moines as political refugees, brides, students, poor peasants, and women looking for a way to better their families.

Life was a challenge for the respondents who had to learn how to speak English, shop, use a grocery store, buy and prepare food they did not know, drive a car, educate their children, locate health care, learn the laws of the country, celebrate its holidays, and make a home. The interviewees had to overcome cultural difference such as having to find employment outside the home when their Hispanic culture expected women to stay home and raise families.

The Latinas despaired that their children were losing their Hispanic ways and had become Americanized too fast fearing their children would turn to drugs. The Latinas knew their children were caught between two often-conflicting worlds: one of their parents and the other of the U.S.

The Latinas coped with being away from their families, particularly their mothers, who were an integral part of who they were and how they saw the world. Respondents spoke of loneliness and isolation as they learned to make their way in a place that offered no outreach or support programs.

The research reviewed, for example, a lack of mass transportation that prevented respondents from being able to get out into the community. Because mass transportation was not readily available, the respondents had to learn to drive in the U.S., or be dependent on friends and family. Upon arriving in Des Moines several interviewees who did not know how to drive found learning difficult because they did not speak English.

Incidents of discrimination toward Latinas such as being denied opportunities to rent an apartment, getting accosted in a store for not speaking English, and being told to go back home where they belonged were cited. Hispanic workers were accused of taking jobs from U.S. citizens. The respondents told of being underemployed, and overworked and underpaid based upon the fact they did not have visas or lacked education and job training. They also told exclusion of Latinos by other Latinos because they did not have anything in common.

The study explained the positive impact Latinos made on the community and how these important contributions were often over looked. Latinos took jobs that no one else would take and provided labor that was often in short supply. Latinas also added culture and diversity to Des Moines through new ethnic foods and music.

Latinas described the different means they took to get into the U.S., some by walking across the border undocumented via Mexico or by plane with a visa. The immigrants offered details concerning the decision making process involved in becoming a citizen of the United States. The Latinas described their experiences with Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The research found many Latinas go back and forth between their country of origin and the United States often for lengthy stays in their native country even after becoming U. S. citizens. Reasons most often given for the visits were to be with friends and relatives and to stay connected to their Hispanic culture and language.

Interviewees discussed their religious beliefs and views of the Catholic Church, which were sacred to many and an abhorrent to a few. The topic of death and the issue that some Latinas feel the dead are truly never gone were documented.

The Latinas offered how they celebrated holidays, blending some from their former lives and adding new ones like Thanksgiving. The interviewees discussed the differences between Hispanic and Anglo cultures. Latinas believed friendships and getting together with friends was a large part of their social lives as well as dancing and listening to Latino music.

The respondents shared their successes such as buying a home, which gave them the feeling that they had arrived and had made a home. Yet other respondents planned and saved money to be able to return to their former countries after having failed to assimilate in their new country.

The women also shared their hopes and dreams for the future. They wanted their children to graduate from school. Respondents wanted to own homes, learn English, find jobs that paid well and they wanted to feel good about living in the United States and Des Moines.

Conclusions

The Latinas felt that Des Moines did not see the potential and talents of Latina women living in the community. Latinas living in the area had much to offer but were not sought out and their talents laid wasted. Many of the Latinas were underemployed, they were not provided opportunities for training and were hence underutilized.

In addition, the community allowed prejudice to get in the way of seeing the potential some of the Latinas had and prevented them from finding ways to cultivate their innate skills.

Even now when they first arrive in the area many of the Latinas feel discriminated against and isolated, and the longer she remains underutilized the harder it is for her to have self-confidence to go out and develop skills needed for a decent job.

The lack of mass transportation was a major issue in Des Moines. A few of the respondents did not know how to drive when they arrived in the U.S. Without a car the Latina was at a distinct disadvantage in being able to seek either employment or education. Finally, the greatest hindrance for trained Latinas immigrating to the U.S. was an undocumented status. Without legal papers the Latinas could not find employment relating to her skills.

Learning to speak English was the single most important tool a Latina needed in order to be able to survive effectively in the United States. The fact that many of the Latinas spoke with an accent or had difficulty speaking English created a barrier toward recognition of their skill abilities. Latinas who did not speak English felt that they were looked down upon and considered less intelligent.

Any aspect of an immigrant woman's life in Des Moines was affected by her language skill, indeed even trying to ride a bus or pass her driver's test was a problem without a fair knowledge of English. Those Latinas who did not speak English could not ask a neighbor for assistance and were limited socially to only Spanish speaking friends. Finding a place of worship that a Latina could understand was also a factor for non-English speaking interviewees.

In addition there were very few jobs available that did not require some proficiency in English and those jobs that were available tended to be poorer paying and without benefits such as health insurance. Of course not knowing how to speak English was one of the greatest hindrances for Latinas to finish their education and access to current news was an issue for Spanish speaking individuals. If the news reported a story that affected the Latina, she would not be able to understand the details.

Latino youth, particularly Latinas, needed support and assistance in assimilating into the Des Moines community. Without support the Latina's children were subject to problems such as early pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and drugs. Young Latinas were caught between two worlds, those of their parents and that of the U.S. Latinas voiced concern that their youth were at risk, because they had very little help in assimilating into the new culture. Latinas were frustrated when they could not get their children to follow the cultural norms they wanted. Children were upset because they could not do as other American youth did.

Hispanic families were also caught up in trying to earn a wage; with both parents working, children could go unattended. The family may have valued a job over an education because the need to survive had been so strong. Furthermore, with the cultural bias for girls to become mothers and raise a family, the value of education was at further risk. Without mentors or programs, Hispanic youth turned to drugs and crime.

The Latinas felt that Des Moines did not recognize the vast diversity among the Latinas living in the area and assumed Latinos were all the same with like interests and desires. The Des Moines area presumed that most of the Latinas were from Mexico, had arrived poor and without documentation. The Latinas involved in the study however, were from ten different countries and from both rural farm areas and major urban cities. They saw themselves as different from one another, they wanted to be referred to differently, and in fact even their physical characteristics were different some had brown eyes and dark hair; others light brown hair and green eyes. The Latinas liked different foods and preferred different religions. Some were Protestants and others Catholic even celebrating different holidays. *Cinco de Mayo* was of paramount importance for some, of little importance to others.

The Latinas were mixed in their educational levels and areas of work. Some had not finished elementary school while others had advanced college degrees. They worked as pharmacists, accountants, fast food servers, housekeepers, translators, teachers, students, owned their businesses, or were mothers at home.

Even from the day of their arrival in the U.S., the Latinas had marked differences in their experiences in living here. Some came by plane with a permanent Visa, while others walked across the border undocumented. Many had become U.S. citizens; some were in the process of applying, but others would never become citizens. Clearly they were from vastly different economic levels, some having come from to the U.S. very poor others from wealth and well-to-do families.

After years of living in Des Moines, the research found Latinas had different attitudes about living in the area. Some of the respondents felt Des Moines was a healthy place for their children; others hated the winter. Some saw Des Moines citizens as boring and uncultured, and for others Des Moines was the best place they had ever lived.

In short the Latinas were not a homogenous group of individuals. The one single thing they had in common was the ability to speak Spanish, most everything else varied, but the community saw sameness.

We expect immigrants to immediately assimilate into the United States, speak our language, obey our laws and act like we do. But we offer little help. We complain about immigrants who don't act like United States citizens but is it because we did not show them or tell them the rules of the game?

We have immigration laws that frequently change but no place for Latinos to find the correct information. We are offended when someone breaks a law, but we don't readily provide Latinos with help in learning the laws of the country. We do not have a clearinghouse or central location for immigrants who would like to ask basic questions on how to live in the United States. Assimilation or acculturation, it seemed to these Latinas, was just supposed to happen.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations include that opportunities for Latinas to learn English be made more available. The findings suggest that programs for teaching English to Latinas need to be offered in a non-threatening environment, available when Latinas are available with child care and transportation provided with these programs. The findings would also suggest that classes be taught in tandem with Latinos and non-Latinos to help build understanding and relationships between different communities. The current research suggests that the more a Latina can speak English the better chance she has of finding employment and advancing her education.

It is further recommended that more cultural diversity training is needed with respect to indigenous Latinas who have immigrated to the U.S. and that these training sessions be made available to public schools, colleges, and work place settings. Training is needed to promote more awareness and appreciation of Latino culture.

The study further recommends that there be a center for information to help immigrants learn what is expected of them and how to adapt to living in Des Moines. This should be a place of learning that would provide new immigrants information: on local laws, English classes, how to apply for citizenship, job training, and other basic questions that immigrants need addressed for living in Des Moines.

Research Recommendations

Several recommendations for further research are based on this study. Further research needs to be conducted on what having a command of English does or does not do for a Latina's self-esteem. How does a Latina feel about herself when she does not speak

English living in Des Moines? This information could help with understanding how Latinas adjust to living in a foreign country with a different language. Any information on language skills could have an affect on legislative proposals such as the English only bill or English as a second language programs in the school.

Research should be done to follow up on the hypothesis that the more indigenous a Latina looks the more likely she will be a victim of discrimination. The current findings did not discern what created more specific incidents of discrimination towards Latinas, if it was lack of English language, color of skin and hair, attitude, or all of the above. Also recommended for further research is to look at those businesses that have successfully afforded Latinas job opportunities be studied. How did companies recruit and train Latinas to be an effective and valued employee? How did these corporations foster employment that Latinas were content to do? How did those companies that have diverse populations provide working environments that fostered career opportunities for both Latino and non-Latino? Future research could help provide Latinas an understanding of how to create better employment for themselves while living in the U.S.

A question for future research is why do Latinas leave the Catholic Church after moving to the United States? Do the Latinas leave the church because there is more opportunity to choose from a variety of religious beliefs? Information on how Latinas view the Catholic Church and other religions could help those institutions develop better relationships and programs for Latinas that could create a more sustained commitment to that faith.

The hypothesis should be tested that Latinas who come from families where one or more parents are absent from the home have a higher incident of leaving their country of origin and immigrating to United States. Does divorce or the lack of a parent allow for a Latina to more easily leave her country and allow her to immigrate to a foreign country and why is this so? Are missing parents the largest factor for immigrating Latinas or only one small component of many?

The findings suggest that additional research be done to determine if Latinas who had the ability to speak English and came with documentation for entry into the United States: find better jobs, live in nicer neighborhoods, have had children who stayed in school and were subject to less incidents of discrimination. Research should be done to determine what programs need to be available and prioritized to support Latinas.

Self-esteem issues need to be studied with respect to Latinas. Does self esteem affect how a Latina adapts to the United States? Do Latinas have lower self-esteem and, if so, is this a cultural barrier? Would self-esteem support help Latinas develop greater potential for themselves living in the United States? Is self-esteem affected by living in the United States or is it fostered for Latinas themselves? The findings suggested that self-esteem training provided to a few Latinas interviewed created a different way of thinking that allowed the subjects to better adapt to the United States. Further research could conclude that Latina self-esteem is an issue that needs more attention.

Implications

The current research did not address any issues of dependency, but the researcher feels that there are some Latinas who immigrated to the United States to keep other members of their family from dire poverty. Those family members still residing in the former country depend greatly for economic support on the immigrating Latinas so that the latter stay in the

United States whether they want to or not. My thought that once individuals move to the United States and send money home it is difficult not to continue doing so as the family becomes dependent upon this support. There are Latinos and Latinas who make the sacrifice to move from their countries of origin in order to support their families indefinitely and that, at some point, many finally resolve to stay in the United States.

Along with this same theme are those Latinas who came to live in the United States a short period of time but became so entrenched with what the U.S. could provide for them that, it was difficult to leave even if they were poor by U.S. standards and mistreated. Latinos and Latinas wanted to return to their countries when it was economically feasible. However the longer they stayed in the United States the harder it was for them to return to a life of poverty. There are Hispanics who ended up staying in the U.S. even though there was very little that accommodated them as Latinas; they may dislike the food, weather, laws, housing, and treatment but being able to eat, have shelter, and send money home overrides other concerns.

In each of these implications there is an underlying tension between cultural identity, a feeling of home on the one hand, and a need or desire for a decent living on the other. All who come, and likely many who stay, feel this tension.

Another implication of this research is that Latino families who have the means send their daughters to the U.S. in order to escape a life of subservience. Families want to encourage their daughters to become fluent in English because it allows them to have power and influence when they return home to their native country. Parents who send their daughters to the United States to study are not surprised that the Latinas decide to stay. By living in the United States their daughters are not dependent on cultural expectations to marry and produce a family at such a fairly young age. Latinas who move to the United States do not have to put up with as much of the machismo attitude that Latino men have and are more able to develop relationships with partners that are based on equal treatment. Also, having a daughter move to the United States affords the Latina a place to retire to where she would have more economic advantages not found in her former country.

The current research did not study any flux of Latino immigration to the U.S. that may or may not happen in the future. But if there are economic changes in Latin America that allow for a small increase in lifestyle and the ability to stay within the borders of their country, Latinos and Latina will not come to the U.S. The slowing down of Latino immigrants into the United States will have an impact on the already short supply of laborers in the United States. A slowdown of Latino immigrants will create an even bigger shortage of the laborers needed to do those jobs that Anglos do not want, and inexpensive labor will no longer exist in the United States. Labor will become expensive and products coming from the U.S. will reflect it. The United States will need to review its current immigration polices, grant amnesty to those who are already here and create an incentive to stay if it becomes economically viable for the Latino to go home.

In the future the border between Mexico and the United States may have to become more porous, allowing for workers, and goods and services to flow freely back and forth between the two countries and the rest of Latin America.

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Conclusions

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We expect immigrants to immediately assimilate into the United States, speak our language, obey our laws and act like we do.

Policy recommendations

Opportunities for Latinas to learn English be more readily available.

More cultural diversity training is needed with respect to indigenous Latinas who have immigrated to the United States.

A center for information to help immigrants learn what is expected of individuals living in Des Moines, living in the United States and how to adapt.